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# THE MAJLIS METAMORPHOSIS: Virtues of Local Traditional Environmental Design in a Contemporary Context

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MFA Thesis  
Project

# THE MAJLIS METAMORPHOSIS

Virtues of Local Traditional Environmental Design in a Contemporary Context

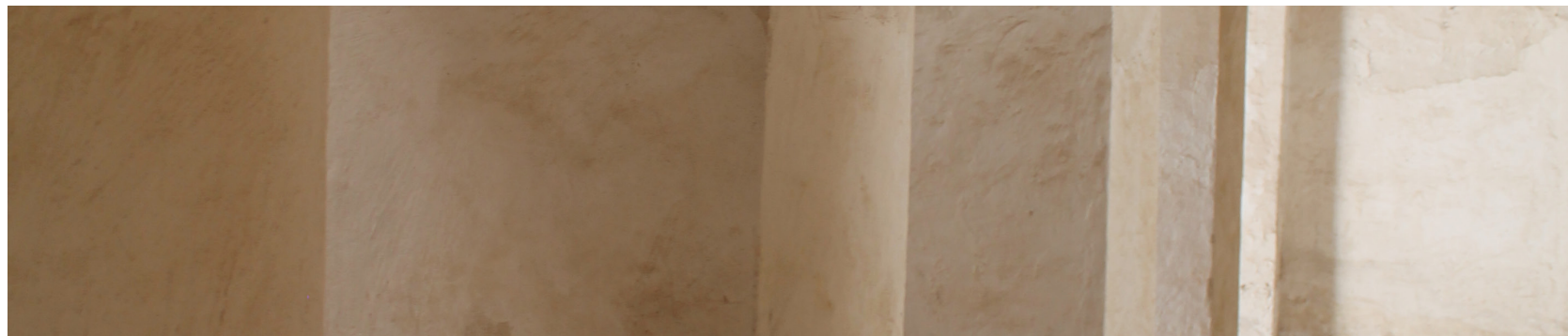
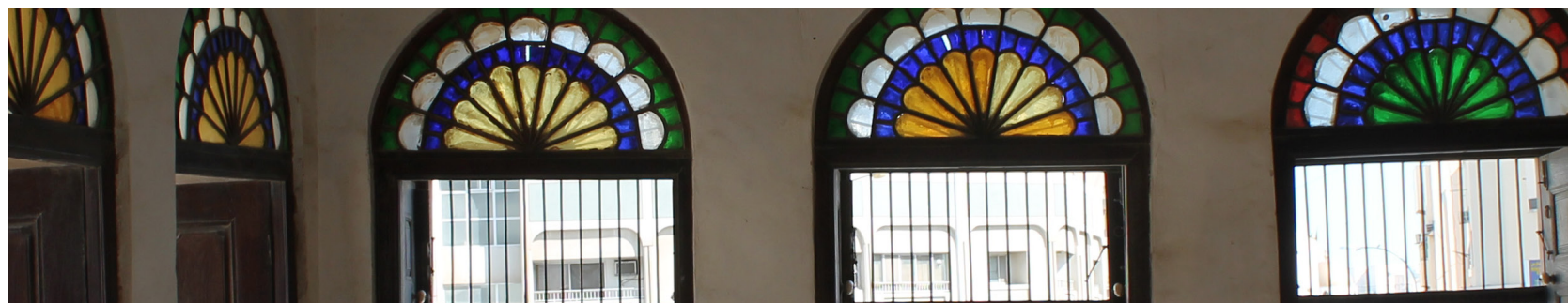
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# 1

## Abstract

In the Arabian Gulf countries, the majlis is a central part of the house. The most public space within it, the majlis represents the household's occupants to society and its social and economic status. As the house reflects culture and civilization, so the family is understood as a micro-level society of individuals raised in its institutions. Hence, the house is a manifestation of family structure, religious beliefs, and individual needs and desires, reflecting the family's economic, cultural, and social backgrounds and aspirations.

The majlis offers a unique space in Arab societies, articulating cultural and social factors that directly impact identity. Accordingly, the design of the majlis and meanings associated with its constituents are essential to the discussion about Qatari culture and society from past to present (Rapoport 1969). One's identity is proclaimed in all facets

of daily life. Home making is a process of place making, and place identity is both a physical and environmental phenomenon, denoting self-identity. The house thus externalizes personal, social, and self-identification activities (Proshansky and Kaminoff 1983). Since the discovery of oil in Qatar, there has been a noteworthy change in the way that houses have been designed, with a major transformation in the use of house and majlis over the last few generations, including social factors such as family social structure, the role of women, kinship and its relationship with privacy and proximity, and economic factors such as the availability of disposable income.

This research explores the evolution of house architecture in Qatar with a focus on the design and social impact of the majlis. The physical and social changes in the period between pre-oil discovery until today have created gaps between the built form, climate, and sociocultural

activities. This research attempts to bridge this gap, concentrating on the majlis.

# 2

## Acknowledgments

# 2

## Acknowledgments

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# 3

Introduction  
Problem Statement  
Justification  
Delimitations



# 3

## Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the main topic of this MFA design thesis, Virtues of Local Traditional Environmental Design in a Contemporary Context: The Majlis Metamorphosis. It outlines the overall thesis work, including reasons for the topic selection and its delimitations.

Qatar 1930: The dull, beige land of the Qatari peninsula extends its palm out to greet the sparkling blue ocean . The white sails stand proudly over the floating dhows; the winds carry the whispers of fishermen, pearl divers and the *Nham*<sup>1</sup> filling the long, harsh nights and the restless, dangerous days of the pearl divers with songs about life, family, and the longing for far away home. The whispers of song travel to the ears of women standing by the shore, whose own voices singing to the ocean—source of their sustenance and of their sorrow—can be heard from the small, simple one-story rectangular rock dwellings scattered alongside Qatar’s eastern bay. The call to prayer echoes from the mosque minarets towering over the landscape beside one prominent house, the house of Abdullah

Bin Jasim Al Thani, Qatar’s ruler. Under the bright sun, 30,000 people tolerated the hot, humid summers. The ocean surrounding the land was the source of life and death; it gave the people of the Gulf its treasures, pearls, and fish, and demanded the highest price: their health and their lives.

The aromas of oils, spices, rice, beans, wheat, and dates could be tracked to Souq Waqif on the banks of Wadi Musheireb, a stream of water that broke inland every winter, and where, on the banks of the Wadi, people stood to buy and sell their goods Figure 1 With the early hours of morning, women

racing the blistering sun stepped outside their small houses to fetch water from wells. The aromas of fresh flat bread and hot tea filled the courtyard houses before 7 a.m. By 8 a.m., the city was wide-awake. Camels hauled water to hefty wholesale traders. The traditional white *thoob*<sup>2</sup> of men and black *abaya*<sup>3</sup> of women carrying out their daily activities colored the narrow, breezy streets. Young boys and a few young girls raced to go to *kuttab*<sup>4</sup> or *mtawa*<sup>5</sup> where- their voices reciting Quran and Arabic could be heard from the end of the street. The laughter and discussions of men, the ringing of the brass mortar, and the smell of coffee and cardamom could be sensed



Figure 1 Areal image of Doha 1940



Figure 2 Areal image of Doha, 2015

through the majlis windows overlooking the streets. Regardless of the difficult life conditions and minimum income, most of the families had a separate men’s majlis—the place for men to meet, discuss, and show their hospitality. It was a beautiful, simple life: there were no telephones, no televisions, and no cars; everything was close to home and everyone knew each other (Senger 2010). Qatar 2015: The glass and concrete skyscrapers thrust up towards the sky overlooking the blue ocean.

Combinations of blue and green reflective glass, gleaming metal, rich stone and grey concrete create the facades of many mega-developments Figure 2. The West Bay LED lights of glistening towers shine over the dhows gliding in the ocean as the luxury cars strolling the wide paved streets reflect the wealth of the country, At the end of a long walkway, reaching into the sea from the Corniche, sits the dazzlingly overlapping cubic structure of the Museum of Islamic Art. Following the aromas of oils, spices, coffee beans, and the passing horses and camels leads to the newly reconstructed Souq Waqif.

The swish of the luxury yachts resting in the marinas could be heard in the glitzy apartments and retail showrooms of The Pearl. In Education City, on the outskirts of the Doha, two curving structures decorated with calligraphy rise towards the sky, as pod-shaped lecture halls squat between rectangular structures; across the street, a huge spider sculpture can be glimpsed behind a tree-shaped façade. Aspire, the smokestack-shaped tower wrapped in wire mesh rising 318 meters, is an icon for Sport City. The many different buildings, between them green parks, golf courses, and upscale malls and luxury hotels and the vibration of tall cranes surrounding many areas in Qatar’s skyline, are the background music of the city, lending a surreal feel to the once empty, poor desert land that bloomed with natural gas and oil.

Individual sloped roofs of two- to three-level villas, or traditional castle-inspired villas with glass windows and garages for cars, in addition to the utilitarian compound houses, create the neighborhoods distributed all over the country. Neighborhoods have many

commercial facilities such as banks, ATM machines, supermarkets, coffee shops, and laundry services. Cars park next to the glass façade majlis overlooking the streets, from which the sounds of television, ring of telephones, and discussions of men can be heard With the early hours of morning, the aroma of American coffee fills the house while the domestic help assist the family to get ready for school and work. By 7:00 am, the city is wide-awake, while women, men, and children race to reach their work in the skyscrapers and their schools or universities. The white thoob and black abaya of Qatari men and women stand out are in the sea of colorful clothes of the other residents. If you listen closely, you can hear many languages spoken in the streets. The small population of Qatari citizens forms approximately 12% of the 2,334,029 residents of Qatar and have the highest GDP per capita in the world (Population Structure 2015).

The comparison between the two scenes of Qatar in 1930 and Qatar in 2015 clarifies the vast development that happened in a very short period of time, but it also illuminates the difference between the life of the people of Qatar before and after the discovery of oil. Before oil, Qatar, as the other Gulf region countries, was populated with Bedouin nomadic tribes, fishermen, and pearl divers. They lived a hard and simple life due to the harsh climate and limited natural resources. The impact of other cultures existed but was limited, the

<sup>1</sup>Traditional singer  
<sup>2</sup>Traditional dress for men  
<sup>3</sup>Traditional dress for women  
<sup>4</sup>A place to learn writing and reading  
<sup>5</sup>Quran teacher





sense of community was strong, and neighbors were closer. The discovery of oil began impacting Qatar in the 1960s. The impacts were both economical and cultural, among others. The nomadic and simple society became urban, settled, and wealthy. Since the 1960s, the country has seen rapid change that slowed down towards the 1980s, but accelerated again at the end of the 1990s.

The second scene describes Qatar today; While the country is modern and the people more mixed, hints of that simple society of before still remain. The traditional clothes, the majlis, and family oriented life, although less prominent, can still be seen.

However, it is questionable if the meanings or purposes of these elements are still the same. This transition and acceleration happened only in 40-50 years, and even although it ensured the region's place on the map of the progressive, modern world, it did not come without problems.

“So much has changed in Qatar. Everything has become bigger—the shops, the houses, the whole of Doha,”

says Mohammed Abdul-Aziz, a 65-year-old Qatari who spends much of his free time in Souq Waqif.



# 3.1

## Problem Statement

The 2030 Qatar Vision is based on four pillars of development: economic, social, environmental, and human. The goal of social development is to “preserve Qatar’s national heritage and enhance Arab and Islamic values and identity” (Qatar National Vision 2030, 12).

One of the most frequently cited points in the Qatar National Vision 2030 document is the balance between modernization and preservation of traditions, which is the first point under the title “Defining Characteristics of Qatar’s Future Opportunities and Challenges”. The document explains this tension as follows: Preservation of cultural traditions is a major challenge that confronts many societies in a rapidly globalizing and increasingly interconnected world. Qatar’s very rapid economic and population growth have created intense strains between the old and new in almost every aspect of life . . . Yet it is possible to combine modern life with values and culture. Other societies have successfully molded modernization around local culture and traditions. Qatar’s National Vision responds to this challenge and seeks to connect

and balance the old and the new (Qatar National Vision 2030, 2).

The idea of creating a society that embraces modernity without letting go of its positive values and culture is a noble theory. However, the fact is that the fast and sudden shifts that impacted Qatar in various aspects had an impact both in the social and physical built environment. The goal of creating a globalized, modern city has accelerated the design and construction process in Doha, Qatar, and its neighboring cities. This has sparked a discussion among architecture academics and scholars of the architectural identity of these cities. Doha identifies itself as a modern city with deep roots in the past. Most of its public governmental structures are designed with the aim to balance modern principles, ideas, and theories with the traditional elements and values of both Islam and the local heritage. Achieving this aim, however, varies in its level of success.

Questions about the architectural identity of Doha and other Arabian Gulf cities have begun to emerge during the past two decades. Arabian Gulf countries are competing to globalize

their cities while simultaneously maintaining a distinctive character. Global cosmopolitan cities such as New York, London, and Tokyo became global over hundreds of years of development. Hence, these cities have acquired unique identities while maintaining their heritage even through the creation of new contemporary projects.

Arabian Gulf cities, on the other hand, have developed rapidly over the last few decades. The debate over the architectural identities of these cities in relation to each other and to other global cities has been going on for almost 15 years. Doha, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and recently Riyadh, among other cities in Saudi Arabia, have used the same resources—and in many cases hired the same international architects—as one another.

The Arabian Gulf cities have, however, adopted different strategies to reach the same goal of maintaining their heritage, acquiring modernity, and achieving a distinctive character. A closer look at Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha reveals the fact that Dubai adopted a more commercial approach that was

sometimes inspired by regional or local architecture. However, this inspiration was merely superficial, focusing on visual elements but neglecting traditional values. For example, the design of the Burj Khalifa building was inspired by desert flowers (Figure 3), Burj Al-Arab was inspired by traditional dhow (Figure 4), and the Madinat Jumeirah resort (Figure 5), is promoted in the web page of the resort as “an authentic recreation of ancient Arabia.” All of these buildings are inspired by, or in the case of Madinat Jumeirah resort, a copy of visual architectural elements rather than traditional architectural functional aspects or values, such as contextuality with regards to site, climate control, scale and materials.

Both Abu Dhabi and Doha, by contrast, adopted a cultural approach to development. Abu Dhabi created a comprehensive policy and guidelines for future development. Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 lays out identity and image guidelines in categories such as local landscape, Arab motifs, and family culture. For instance, Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 offers the following identity guidelines under Identity and Imageability, page 40 :



Figure 3 (top right) Burj Khalifa, Figure 4 (top left) Burj Al-Arab, Figure 5 (bottom) Madient Jumeirah



1-The unique Arab traditions and motifs of Abu Dhabi and its environment will be expressed in a pervasive architectural style.

2-The unique family culture and traditions of Abu Dhabi Nationals will be celebrated and enhanced.

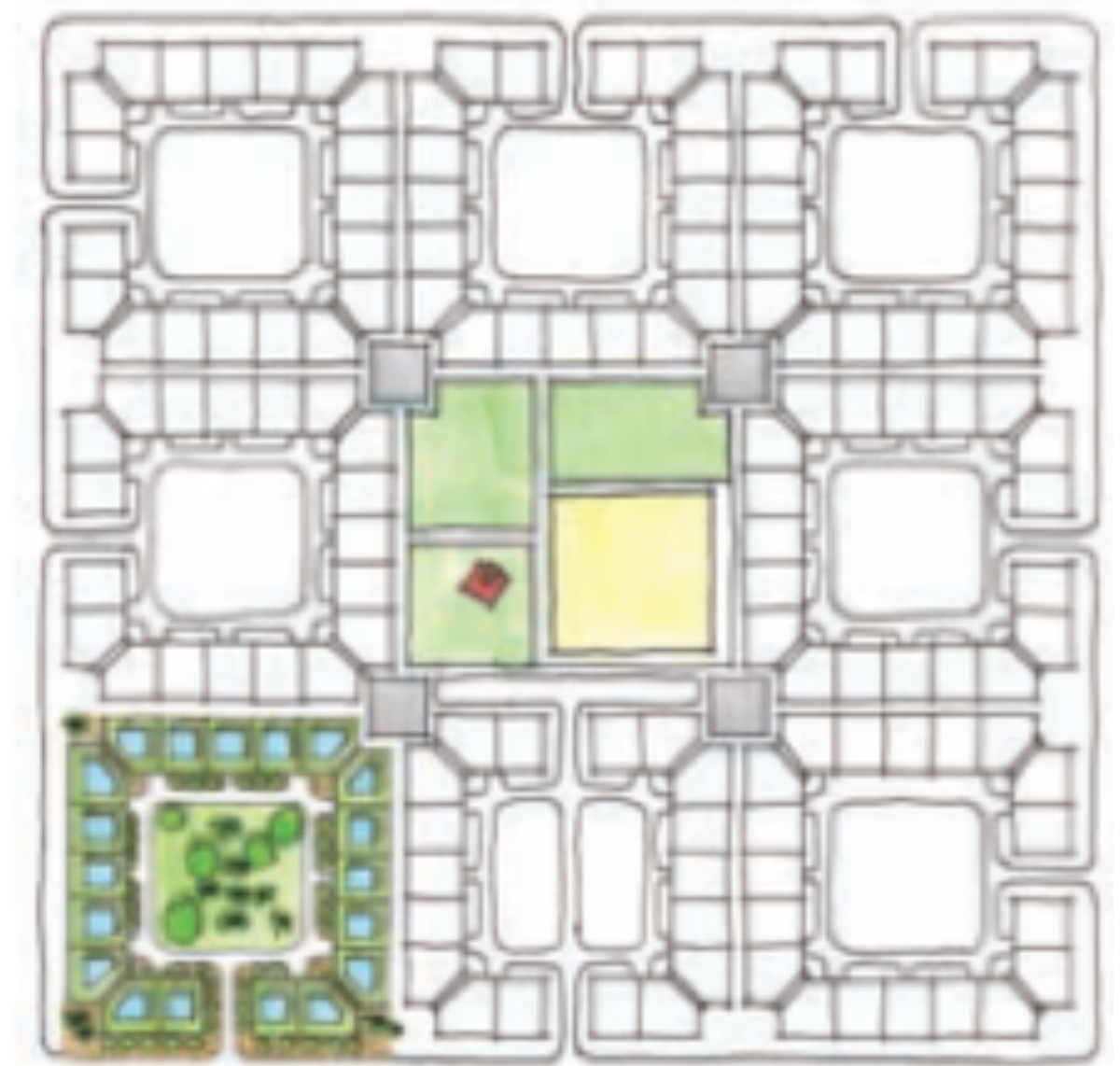
**Fareej  
(240 x 240)**

125 Population  
5.76 Ha  
3.3 Units/Ha  
19 Unit



**Local Cluster  
(720 x 720)**

1,000 Population  
3.0 Units/Ha  
150 Units  
8.2 person /Unit





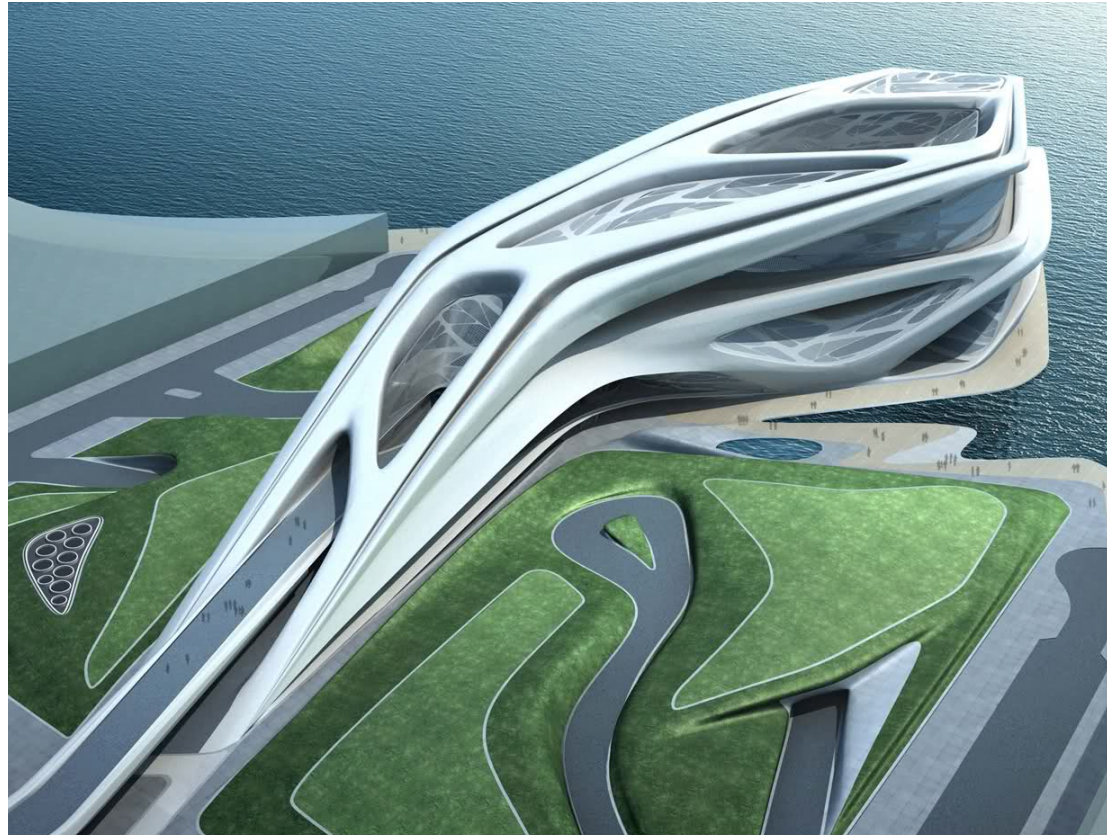


Figure 9: Projects in Saadiyat Island

Also, under the Building Blocks: DNA of the City the document described the re-creation of Fareej in details, providing proposals and sketches for future development (Figures 6 and 7).

However, the current design and construction of public buildings in Abu Dhabi has not found a balance between tradition and modernity and did not incorporate the guidelines of Abu Dhabi 2030, such as Arab motifs. For example, a centralized cultural plan called for the creation of new imported museums on Saadiyat Island (Figure 8), but this cultural cluster isolates the museums in one area, which may limit visitors' experience of the city itself. Furthermore, this plan called for multiple sculptural buildings located in the same area (Figure 9). This resulted in a fabricated culture-oriented version of the real-estate display that distinctively formed Abu Dhabi's sister emirate, Dubai.

By contrast, Doha's vision seems to be a more calculated attempt to balance modernization and tradition. Doha has created a cultural movement celebrating the Arabian Gulf region heritage, and most of Doha's new cultural buildings

are being carefully integrated into the fabric of the city. Doha's first attempt was a sensible and carefully studied public building: the Museum of Islamic Art, designed by I. M. Pei (Figure 10). Unfortunately, the second creation was a sculptural National Museum designed by Jean Nouvel and inspired by the desert rose (Figure 11). The Museum of Islamic Art design utilized existing linear forms in Qatar and captured the essence of Islamic culture through the simplicity of forms and attention to details in the interior space, realized after a careful journey and study of the Islamic world.

Hence, the building is both simple and contextual. The architect drew inspiration from both Islamic and local architecture, language, and character without directly copying it. The museum stacking cubes are reminiscent of the ablution fountain of the mosque of Ibn Tulun.

The museum uses simple rotating geometric shapes with minimum windows and is covered with materials suitable for the climate and shadowing the colors of the Qatari nature. The more detailed interior, with its muqarnas dome made of a stainless steel cupola, is

partially illuminated by an oculus at the top. The employment by Pei of arcades of semi-circular design is more similar those found in Qatar, rather than the pointed arches typical of Islamic architecture



Figure 10 (top): The museum of Islamic Art.



found in its earliest period, in the Great Mosque of Hama. “If the superficial Post-Modern movement gave a ‘bad name’ to historical references in contemporary architecture, it will be shown that Pei’s exploration of the essence of cultures . . . is a real direction for the future” (Jodidio 2008, 82).

The Qatar National Museum, on the other hand, is a giant desert rose. The design neglected the typography of the city and surrounding buildings and celebrated the architect himself, the architecture as a sculptural art, and the ability to create challenging forms using the current available technologies.

Contextuality depended on the inspiration of an existing natural formation (the desert rose); however, the concept was not inspired from the formation process itself, which may have resulted in a different design, but is rather a figurative copy of the desert rose. Msheireb Properties also attempts to bridge the gap between the past and present in order to create a future perspective (Figure 12). The goal is to create a new language of architecture that is based on the values of

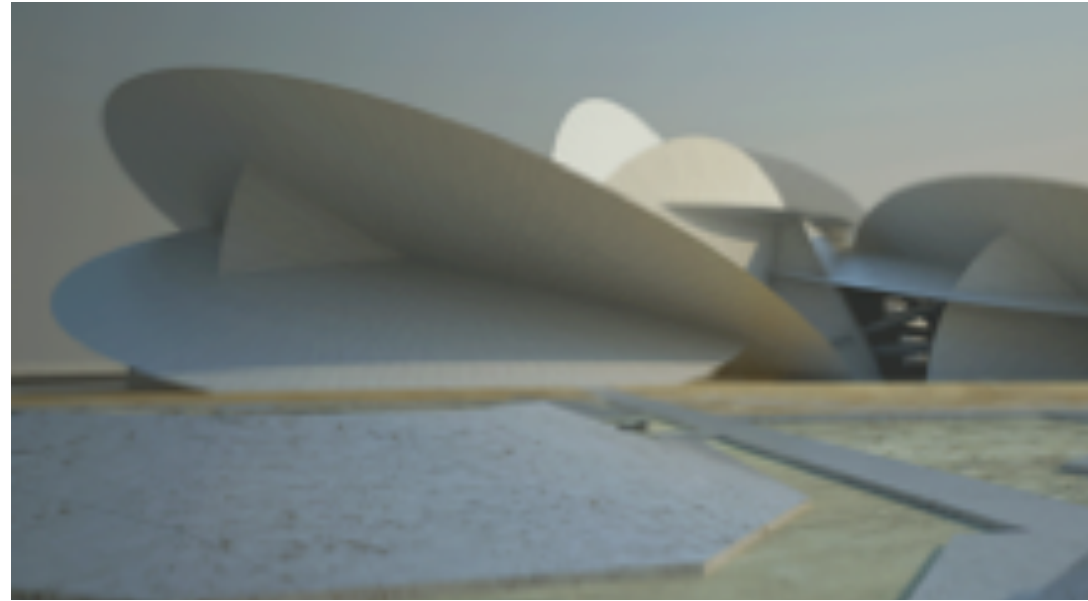


Figure 11 (Top): Qatar National Museum.  
Figure 12 (bottom): Msheireb Properties.



Figure 13: Qasr al Hokm district

the traditional architecture and inspired by its aesthetics.

A notable example of a successful project is Riyadh’s Qasr al Hokm district, an Aga Khan Award winning project built in 1992. The Qasr al Hokm district, along with its nearby public squares and commercial facilities, was designed by architect Rasem Badran. Badran recreated and transformed the architectural language and character of the local Najdi architecture without directly copying it (Figure 13). The new buildings were integrated into the urban fabric instead of standing out clearly as sculptural monuments. The external walls are constructed of local limestone and detailed with small, triangular openings forming patterns inspired by traditional architectural language. These characteristics create a dialogue between the past and the present. The goal of creating a modern country that is rooted in the past as part of

generating an identity is common between the Arab Gulf cities, as shown in the above examples. These are not only statements of forms and architectural compositions made by famous architects, but serious ventures that speak to the environment and culture with different degrees of success. Some of the examples were successful in achieving some degree of the balance between past and present—at least visually—by interpreting the traditional architecture in a contemporary context. Some were imaginary copies and superficial interpretation of the past, while others offered a sculptural representation of non-architectural elements that could exist anywhere in the world. This research aims to find this balance for residential building.

The other noticeable problems in the above examples are the focus on the exterior and façade of the buildings as the means to create identity and as the

main goal of design. The idea of the interior is an essential and integral part of architectural practice; however, limited studies approach the topic of interior environments as a main and individual field of inquiry. The theme of neglecting interiors was addressed in few pavilions in Venice Biennale 2014; among them is the following description of the theme of Spain’s pavilion:

Paradoxically, the architectural interior is in quite good dialectical shape—with many writers and critics keen to review, from different perspectives, a concept so fundamental that architecture would not exist without it—but in a terrible historical state, practically abandoned for an almost ubiquitous technical approach that resolves the project with an envelope of maximized intensity and an extremely banal interior layout that is left to commercial products and generic spatial configurations (a marketing concept adopted by many architects, as belied by

the widespread use of the term ‘envelope’ when referring to the outer walls). (Abalos, June 2014).

The focus on the evolution of public and commercial buildings with the neglect of the studies and development of guidelines for house design is another problem. The mega-development in Doha, for instance, focused on public buildings rather than on residential developments suitable for the citizens and inhabitants of Qatar. Even in cases where residential buildings were part of the development (such as Msheireb, Katara, and Lusail), the focus was mainly on the exterior architectural image rather than the interior spaces.

Although municipal plans and regulations sometimes enforce superficial heritage elements, they neglect the essence and value of the local heritage and, by extension, the sociocultural factors of building design. Generally, governments and developers try to create an understanding about housing and rely increasingly on large, and generic data collection and analysis and standard market research tools, which cannot reveal residents’ real experiences,

expectations, and requirements. This thesis explores the balance between the old and the new in areas that are rarely addressed in the discussions about the creation of a modern Doha. The research explores the virtues of interior environments in the traditional local houses that existed during the era of pearl diving from the 1930s-1960s, focusing on the cultural, social, and religious values in that era and the interpretation and transition of these values<sup>7</sup> in a contemporary context.

This study will use both field and applied research to investigate sociocultural and behavioral factors such as environmental aesthetics, perception, environmental cognition, personal space, and privacy, which have resulted in a certain design vocabulary and aesthetic in traditional local dwellings. The study then examines the impact of changes in these factors on the design of interior environments, focusing on the majlis space in contemporary Qatari society. The goal of this research is to examine alternative proposals and recommendations for future majlis design. The proposals aim to revive and reform the positive aspects of traditional values through the use of

built environment. The design proposals will be used as an exploration tool to provide design recommendations for the majlis. The analysis efforts of this paper are focused on the visual and spatial materialization and interpretation of these elements, seeking to identify vernacular vocabularies and reveal the attitudes that define the culture. Focusing on the majlis, the research aims to record and analyze the transformation of the majlis and its impact on social life. The study attempts to devise a vocabulary and to reveal the attitudes that, beyond pure form, allow us to define a culture that is specific to these transformations. This study’s analysis efforts are focused on the interior environments with regards to visual and spatial realization and interpretation of these hidden elements in the quest of re-identifying vernacular vocabularies and uncovering the behaviors that define Qatari culture.

The study attempts to propose alternative design solutions at a micro-scale level—the majlis—by looking at the rapid urban metamorphosis, and underscoring architectural western manifestations and the negligence of interior environments.



## 3.2

### Justification

The Majlis Metamorphosis adopts an interdisciplinary interior environment design approach that is inclusive of architecture, sociology, anthropology, and product design.

A house form, according to Rapoport, is the consequence of a range of socio-cultural factors seen in their broadest terms. The house is a reflection of culture and civilization, as the family is a micro-level society, with the basic element consisting of the individuals being born and raised in the institutions of the family. Hence, the house is a manifestation of the family structure, religious beliefs, and individual needs and desires. It simply reflects the family's economical, cultural, and social backgrounds and aspirations.

This identity is proclaimed in all facets of daily life: the job, the diet, the purchases, and the house. Home making is a process of place making, and place identity is both a physical and environmental phenomenon, denoting self-identity. The home thus materializes a personal, social, and self-identification activities emphasizes that identity is merged into the houses and community to which we

belong (Proshansky and Kaminoff 1983). Therefore, house designs, which result in the type of houses that are built, determine the society that is created. Accordingly, including house design as a factor in the creation of a city's identity is essential.

The debate over modern vs. traditional has mainly centered on urban and architectural identity when it comes to the built environment. The discussion rarely extends to interior environments. This is underscored by the fact that residential environments are often trivialized in front of public environments. While the façade of the city (public buildings) is the focal point of most of these cities, the soul of the city (house and neighborhoods) are forgotten or delayed. Furthermore, while the buildings' façades are highly celebrated, they only give the first impression of the design of buildings for the users; the actual soul lies in the interiors where the users have more personal interaction through materials, finishes, furniture, etc.

In Qatar, the traditional architecture did not evolve appropriately, as the styles

were abandoned due their association with poverty. New, imported, and enforced styles, in both architecture and design, did not properly relate to the local context and did not address social or cultural factors. In order to quickly catch up with the rest of the 'modern world', foreign culture and values were imported and accepted.

The design of houses in general and the majlis in particular changed abruptly after the discovery of oil, while many of the values that led to the creation of both house and majlis in the way they were designed remained mostly the same. The current availability of space and money impacted the design of the house and the majlis, as well as the social values obtained from the majlis. This research aims to build a bridge by bringing together and reconciling the design and the values of the majlis in a contemporary context.

In Qatar, developers of houses and legislators set and enforce house design guidelines, which were created based on British regulations and have since been updated without major changes. These regulations may be suitable for

public building designs, but the housing regulation did not take the cultural and social requirements particular to Qatar into consideration, nor residents' real experiences, expectations, and requirements. An anthropology, sociology, and human-based approach can thus help provide a better understanding of the needs of users and hence enlighten and enhance the domestic experience.



<sup>6</sup> See chapter  
<sup>7</sup> See chapter



# 3.3

## Delimitations

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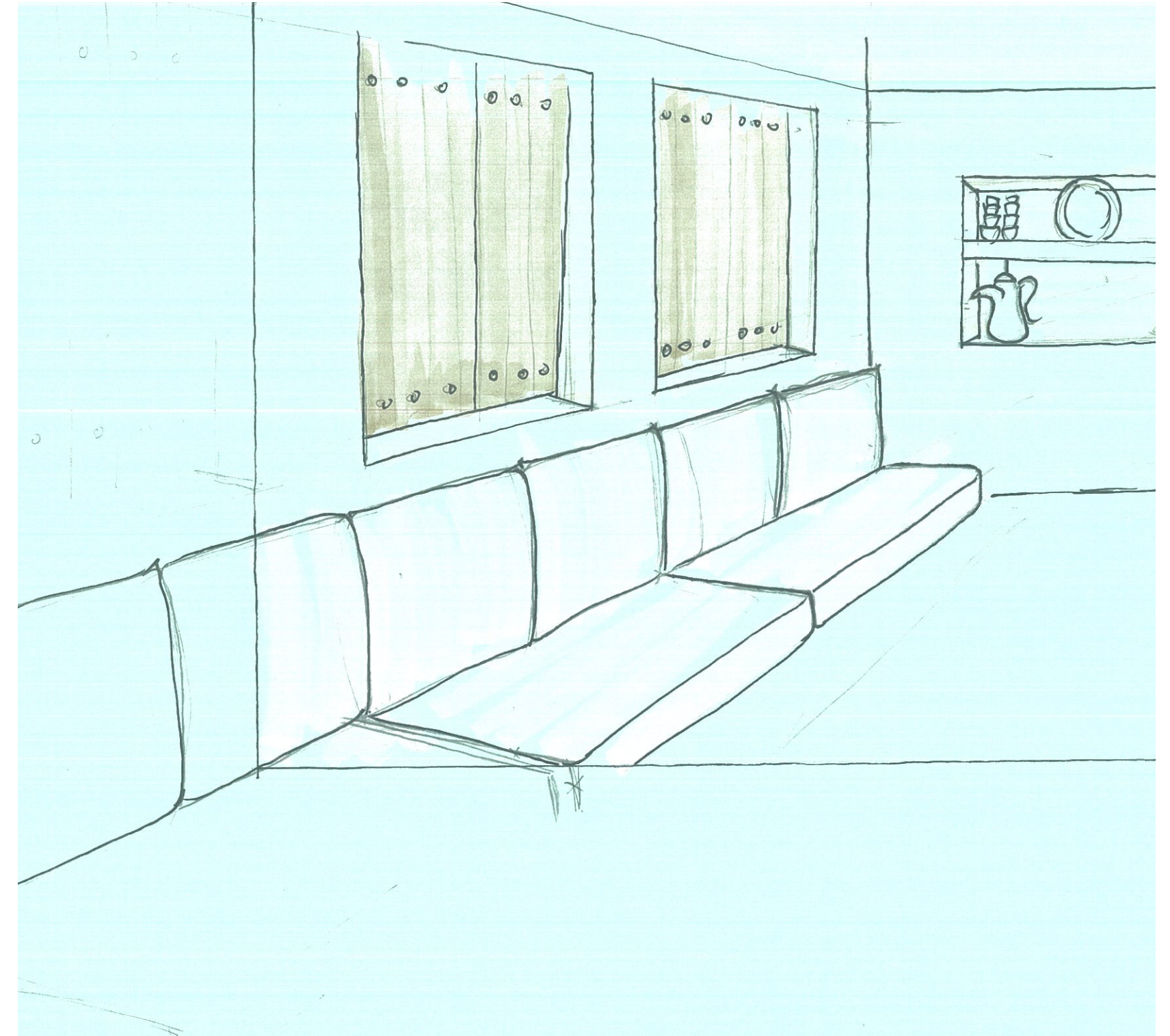
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determine the society that is created. Accordingly, including house design as a factor in the creation of a city's identity is essential. The debate over modern vs. traditional has mainly centered on urban and architectural identity when it comes to the built environment. The discussion rarely extends to interior environments. This is underscored by the fact that residential environments are often trivialized in front of public environments. While the façade of the city (public buildings) is the focal point of most of these cities, the soul of the city (house and neighborhoods) are forgotten or delayed. Furthermore, while the buildings' façades are highly celebrated, they only give the first impression of the design of buildings for the users; the actual soul lies in the interiors where the users have more personal interaction through materials, finishes, furniture, etc.

In Qatar, the traditional architecture did not evolve appropriately, as the styles were abandoned due their association with poverty. New, imported, and enforced styles, in both architecture and design, did not properly relate to the local context and did not address social or cultural factors. In order to quickly catch up with the rest of the 'modern world', foreign culture and

values were imported and accepted. The design of houses in general and the majlis in particular changed abruptly after the discovery of oil, while many of the values that led to the creation of both house and majlis in the way they were designed remained mostly the same. The current availability of space and money impacted the design of the house and the majlis, as well as the social values obtained from the majlis. This research aims to build a bridge by bringing together and reconciling the design and the values of the majlis in a contemporary context.

In Qatar, developers of houses and legislators set and enforce house design guidelines, which were created based on British regulations and have since been updated without major changes. These regulations may be suitable for public building designs, but the housing regulation did not take the cultural and social requirements particular to Qatar into consideration, nor residents' real experiences, expectations, and requirements. An anthropology, sociology, and human-based approach can thus help provide a better understanding of the needs of users and hence enlighten and enhance the domestic experience.



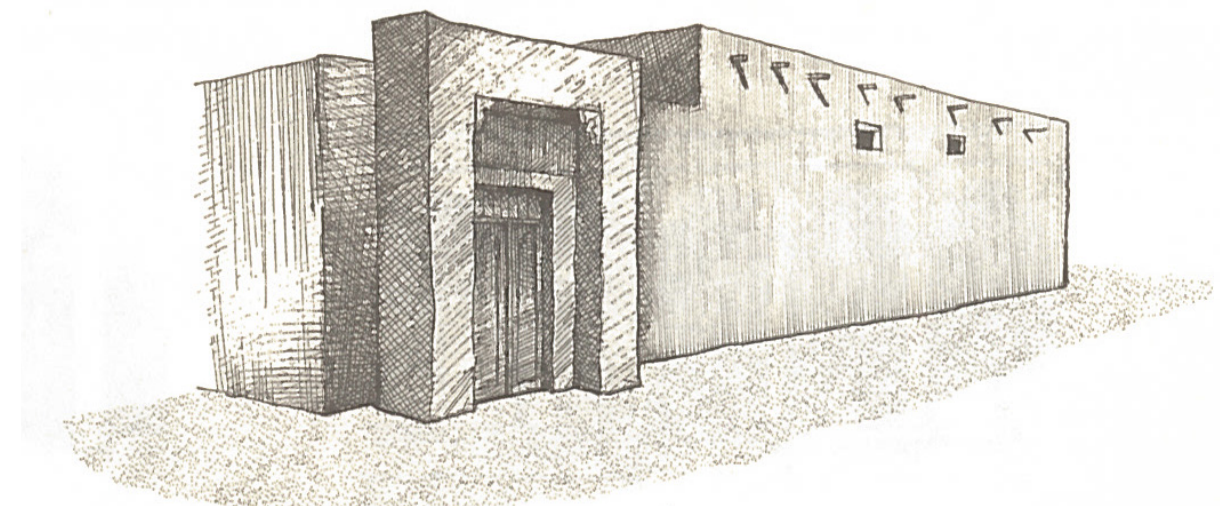
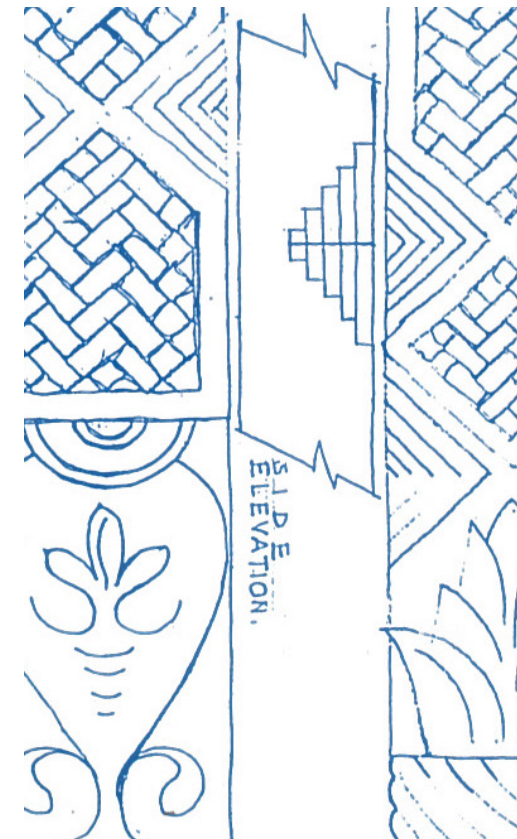
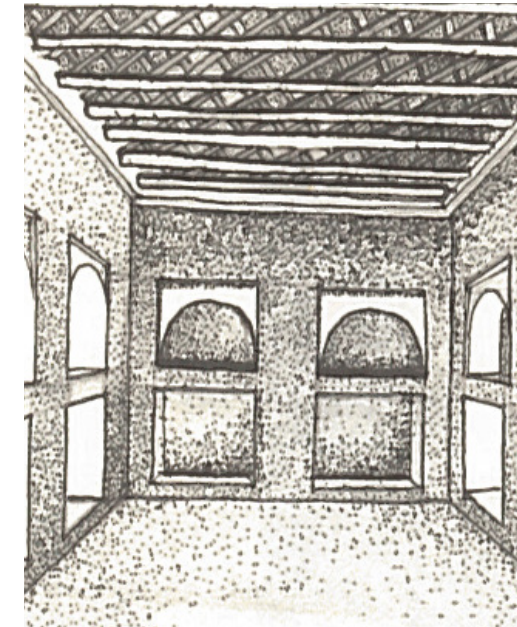
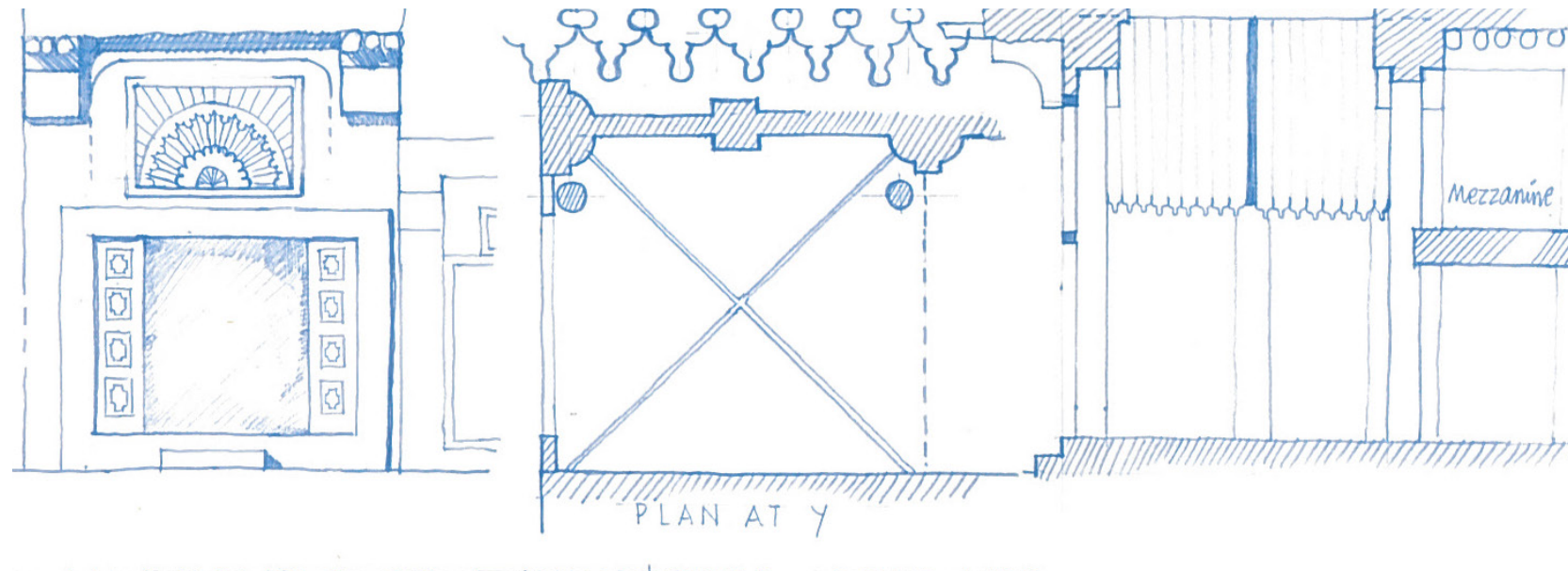
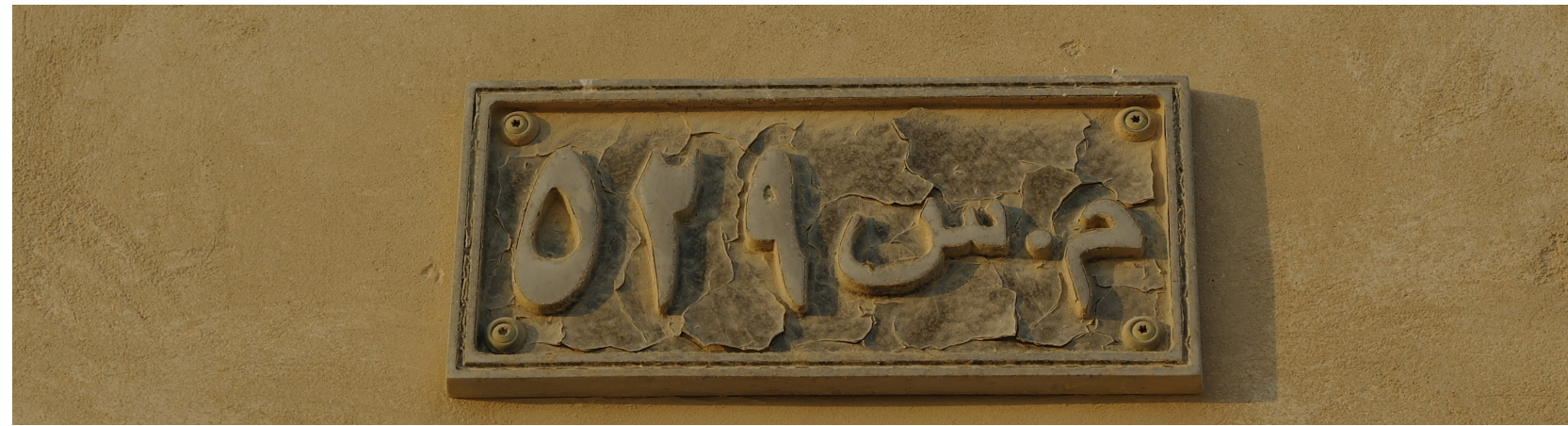
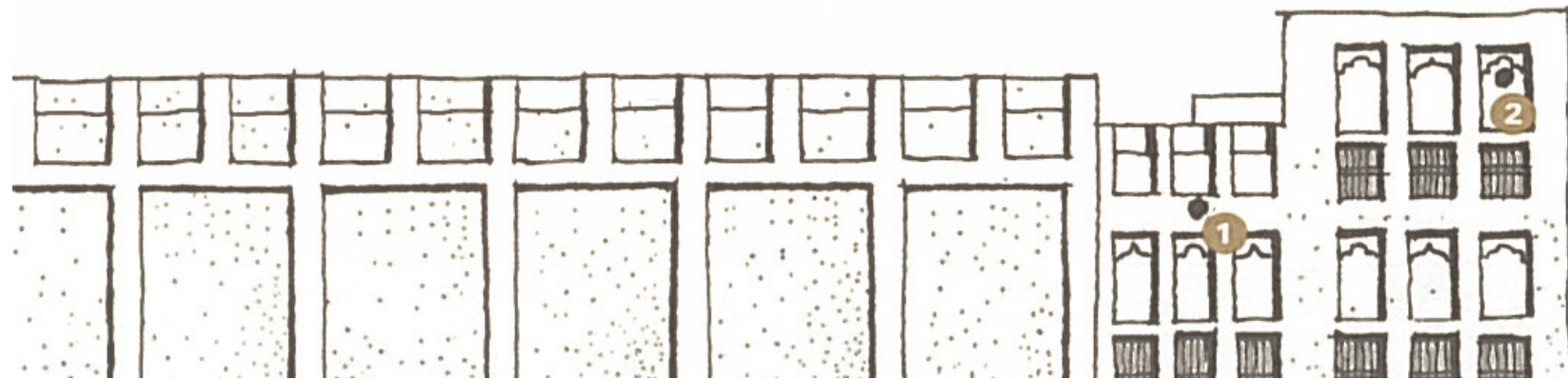
# 4

- Background
- Islamic Values in Architecture
- Virtues of Architecture of Houses in Muslim Cities
- The courtyard houses of Syria- Aleppo
- The courtyard house of Egypt – Cairo
- The courtyard house of Morocco- Fez



# 4

Background



This chapter provides an insight into the historic and theoretical context of the traditional built environment generally and majlis in specific. The topic is related to the built environment and its social impacts in Qatar and, by extension, to the built environment in the Arabian Gulf States. Hence, there is much related to the subject of Islamic design in its wider sense. The following pages will focus on the house architecture and by extension the majlis and design context addressing the Macro level in Islamic architecture in Arab World, Meso level in the Arabian Gulf architecture and, Micro level in the architecture in Qatar.

The chapter will clarify the social values that are driving the design of architecture and that are resulting from the design as well, in addition to clarifying the physical interpretation of these values into tangible virtues in the architecture.

The findings below are the ones that directly stream-lined the flow of the Project. The mentioned definitions, theories, disciplines, scholars, and examples are tools to understand, clarify, confirm, deconstruct, and define the cultural conditions within the Gulf region, and provide an extremely valuable conceptual framework.



# 4.1

## Islamic Values in Architecture

It is important to emphasize that Islamic societies were built within preexisting societies in different areas of world over different periods of time. These preexisting societies had their own architectural and social traditions, vocabularies, and resources prior to the introduction of Islam. In addition to the impact of the different locations and different climates, the frames of Islamic value interpretation change with time. With the spread of Islam, the inhabitants of cities that came under its authority, adopted its basic principles. With time, the Muslim dwellers of each city developed and re-established important centers with an Islamic character of their own, adopting elements from the preexisting towns and cities as they were already established. Many of the physical characteristics, referred to as Islamic, existed in pre-Islamic times.

These factors resulted in the creation of diverse features of design and the arts, per region or culture in the wider Islamic world. Thus, there is no single Islamic architecture, as there is no typical Islamic town other than a town that has evolved through development by Muslims. Hence, architecture within Islamic cities should

be viewed in the light of their context and the social, economic, and environmental factors that impacted their creation. Nonetheless, the physical virtues, or syntax of architecture, are inspired from the values of Islam. The main elements of Islamic-community design were explained in Sharia – Islamic law. Hence, it is essential to understand the basic values of Islam in order to recognize the Islamic-values impact on architecture, planning, design, art, and other aspects.

Islamic architecture is a form of architecture in which both functions (and forms to a lesser degree), are primarily inspired by Islam. It facilitates and nurtures the ‘ibadah (worship) activities of Muslims, and these in turn encompass every moment of their lives. Islamic architecture can come into existence under the teachings of the Islamic perceptions of Allah (God), man, nature, life, death, and life after death. Thus, Islamic architecture provides functional facilities and, at the same time, a physical actualization of the Islamic message. Functionality with all of its extents, physical, intellectual and spiritual, is principal to Islamic architecture.

The separation of form from function is less significant. However, this does not indicate that the form role is prominent in Islamic architecture. The form relevance is a supportive one, complementing and enhancing its function. The form always comes second to function and its broad scope in terms of value and substance (Mortada, 2003, p1-15).

Muslims believe that the Islamic message is the complete, timeless, and universal version of monotheism. In Islam, the prime function of human existence is the recognition and worship of God. The submission to one incomparable God (Tawhid) entails the necessity for humanity to be in harmony with the surrounding world. ‘Islam’ originated from the root of the word s-l-m (salvation, peace, submission) and is the expression of God’s Grace running in a divine system to which all creatures, excluding humanity, have submitted willingly. Hence the universe shows no disorder, for Islam is its religion. Islam can be summarized as two halves: right belief and right action.

The monotheism of Islam is asserted as the oneness and uniqueness of God, being balanced, following the middle course, and having truthfulness in one’s self and one’s actions. As a result, a Muslim shall be at peace within himself and with his social and natural environment. As stated in the Hadith: on the authority of Sufyan bin Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: “I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, tell me something about Islam which I can ask of no one but you.’ He (peace be upon him) said, ‘Say “I believe in Allah” — and then be steadfast.”[Muslim].

The word deen (religion) means “way of life”. Muslims believe that God provided the framework in which life on earth shall be carried out; these frames are articulated by the Qur’an, the Islamic holy book, and by the Sunnah, teachings of a way of life prescribed as normative, and hadith, the prophetic traditions of Mohammed (peace and blessings be upon him). Religious concepts and practices encompass the five pillars of Islam: Shahadh: declaring there is no god except Allah, and Mohammed is Allah’s Messenger, Salah: prayer five times a day, Zakah: giving a set percentage of

one’s savings to the poor, Sawm: fasting and self-control during the month of Ramadan, Hajj: pilgrimage to Mecca, if one is able, at least once in a lifetime. These concepts and practices are fundamental perceptions and mandatory practices of worship following Islamic law, which touches on virtually every aspect of life and society, providing guidance on multifarious topics from banking and welfare, to family life and the environment (Encyclopedia Britannica Online).

Islamic architecture serves the noble goals of Islam and Muslims, by aiding them to effectively carry out their daily activities. Islamic architecture aims to support, and not to obstruct, Muslims in fulfilling duties. Studying Islamic architecture cannot be disconnected from the total framework of Islam: its origin, history, philosophy, worldview, principles, laws, and practices. Islamic architecture evolved distinctive characteristics by embodying Islamic beliefs and teachings through the hierarchy of its varied roles and functions. The essence of Islamic architecture is well recognized and valued by the people whose own lives are inspired and led by the same

foundations that inspire and lead Islamic architecture. Hence, Islamic architecture connotes a process which starts with making an intention ( ), and thinking; it continues with planning, designing, and building phases, and ends with achieving the results and how people both utilize and benefit from them. Whether an organically growing neighborhood or a planned city, both are implementing the same principles with different ranges, as both are responding to the needs of the people. The building phases are not rigid and are adaptive to change over time to accommodate changing social, kin and clan structures; the goals and ends are actually providing a solution to the inhabitants needs.

The evident spiritual character of Islamic architecture, joined with both its educational and social roles, guided the scholars and architects of Islam in addressing the issues concerning diverse dimensions of residential, religious, and communal architecture within the extent of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh islami). The significant issues include: legal rulings in relationship with neighbors and neighborhoods (ahkam al-jiwar), reconciliation (al-





sulh) between direct neighbors and everyone in a neighborhood, prevention of inflicting harm (darar), people’s individual and collective rights, legal rulings in relationship with building (ahkam al-bina’), and public services and facilities (al-marafiq). Undeniably, all these issues are important factors in shaping the identity of Islamic architecture. Architecture is strongly linked to people’s way of life, influencing their attitudes and the way they live their life. Islamic architecture is inspired by Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh islami), hence it does not accept rigidity, formalism, and literal and realistic representation, especially in relation to its structural fields. This has led to the production of symbolic representations and interpretations. What marks an architecture as Islamic are some invisible characteristics of buildings that may or may not fully appear on the physical built environment. The substance of Islamic architecture is consistent, due to the stability of the philosophy and collective values; however, these philosophies and collective values are open for different interpretations. The changing factors are the methods and resources with which people adapt to their own natural

and manufactured circumstances to implement the philosophy and values (Omer, 2014).

Consequently, some scholars prefer the name (Architecture within Islamic Cities) instead of Islamic architecture. The architecture in Islam stimulates unity in diversity, the unity of message and purpose, and the diversity of styles, methods, and solutions. The vocabulary and identity of Islamic architecture evolved as methods for addressing the concerns of Muslim societies. Islamic architecture can be viewed as the vessel of Islamic civilization and culture revealing the identity and the level of the creative and aesthetic consciousness. (Mortada, 2003, p17-82).

The house within a Muslim Arab city is one of the best models that convey the sakina. The word sakina means tranquility and peace and stability, and it comes from the verb sakan which means calmness. The word maskan is the Arabic name for a house and it relates to dwelling in peace and purity (Omer, 2014). The Quran has provided the same description in the following verse in Surat



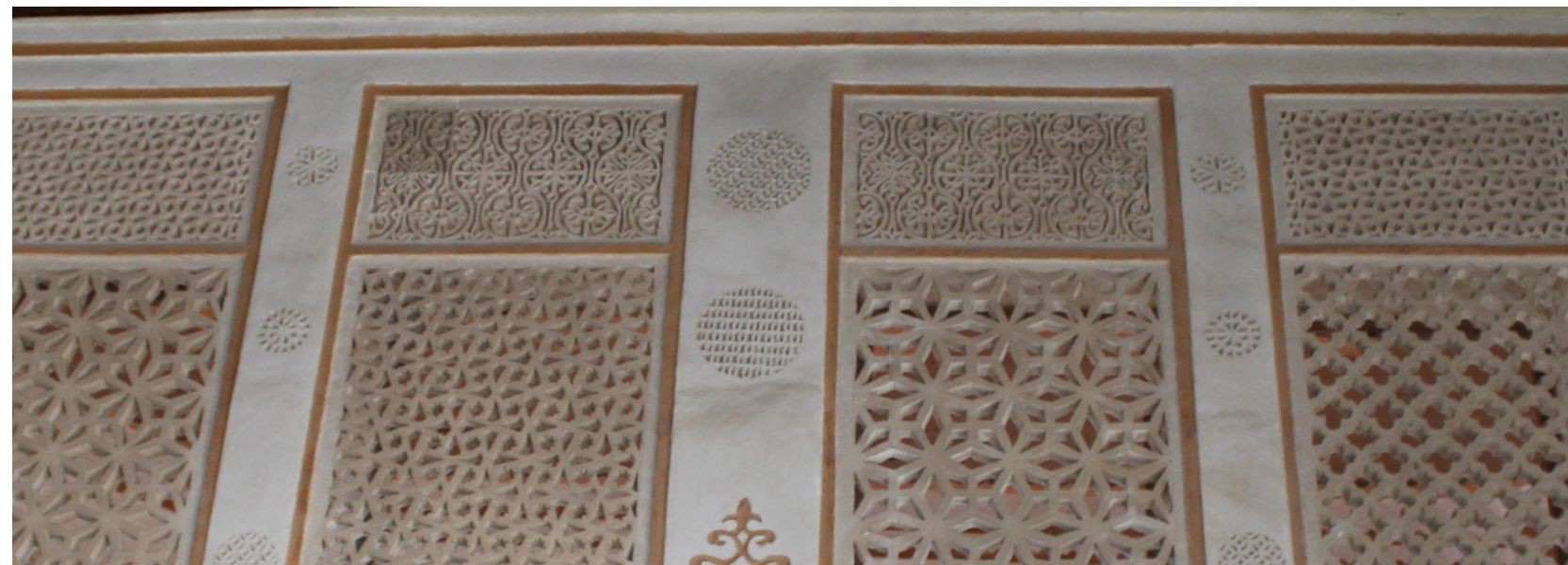
وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمْ سَكَنًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ جُلُودِ  
 الْأَنْعَامِ بُيُوتًا تَسْتَخِفُّونَهَا يَوْمَ ظَعْنِكُمْ وَيَوْمَ إِقَامَتِكُمْ وَمِنْ  
 أَصْوَابِهَا وَأَوْبَارِهَا وَأَشْعَارِهَا أَثْنَا وَمِئْتًا إِلَى حِينٍ ﴿٨٠﴾

Figure 14 Surat An-Nahl 16:80



قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what they do.



And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءَ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا إِلَيْهِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

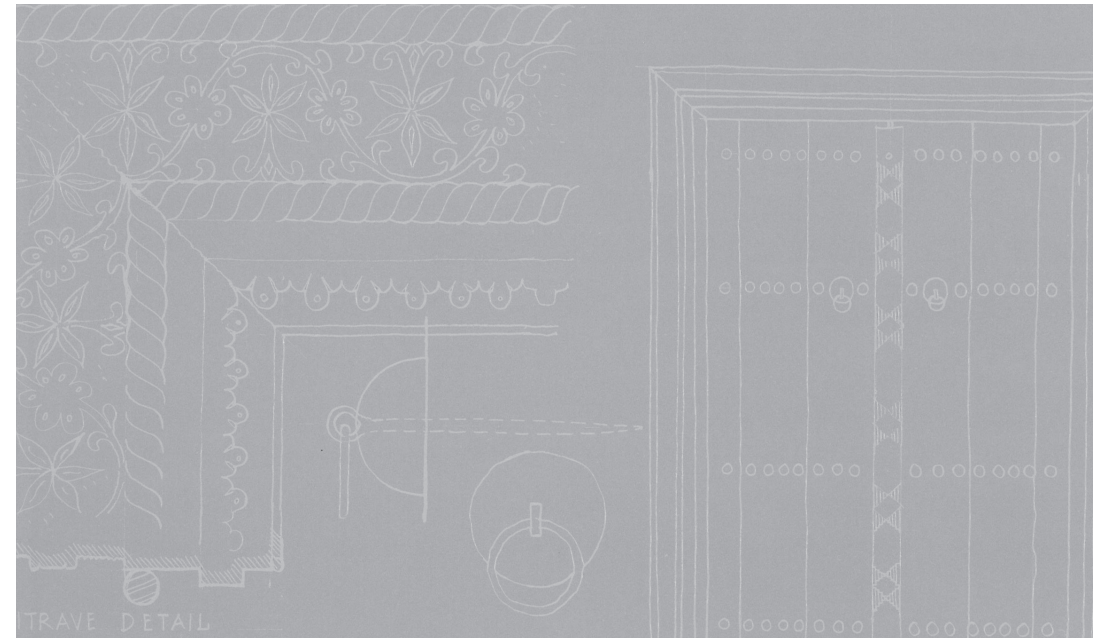
Figure 16 Surat: An-Nūr (The Light) 24:31



Surat Al-'Aḥzāb (The Combined Forces)  
33:32. O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women. If you fear Allah, then do not be soft in speech [to men], lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech.

The rules of dress code and interaction between both genders were the main principles behind the creation of the different levels of privacy in the houses in Arab Muslim cities. The interpretation and implementation of these rules varied between different regions and times.

Thus there are values that are essential to this approach, in which houses within Islamic cities and design in general have developed. These are: emphasis on the internal space and values of family; consideration for neighbors and the broader society; discouraging ostentation; a distinction between, and identification of, public and private functions, responsibilities and territories; and environment preservation and utilizing natural resources sensibly (Lockerbie, 2015).



يٰۤاَيُّهَا النِّبِيُّ لَسُنَّ كَاٰحِدٍ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ اِنْ اَتَقَيْتُنَّ فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ  
بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهٖ مَّرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا ﴿٣٢﴾

Figure 17 Surat Al-'Aḥzāb (The Combined Forces) 33:32





## 4.2

Virtues of Architecture of  
Houses in Muslim Cities

As established above, Islamic teachings provide the main principles among other cultural, economic, and environmental factors and provide well-defined values that identify sharing or resources, limit the possibilities of conflict, and facilitate public movement and access to water and other resources. These values created guidelines for the design of Islamic communities. House design was based on allowing public interaction for the inhabitants whilst preserving the privacy of the household.

Traditional houses within a Muslim Arab city share many similar and distinctive architectural characteristics, while each region has its own socio-cultural factors; the design of houses provided a common architectural solution responding to the common climate conditions and the common religious guidelines. Every architectural component in the houses within a Muslim Arab city embodies an answer to a different problem that results from a specific condition.

The traditional houses are an art form that in essence has resulted from an understanding of a specific approach in human life to religion and culture. The

design concepts of the traditional houses within a Muslim Arab city, where every step, form, and space is shaped by the people's habits and the local conditions.

Courtyard houses date back to the Graeco-Roman period in the Arabian region. The Arab nomads – Badu- used to set up their tents around an open central space to provide shelter and security for their cattle. Hence, having an open space in the courtyard house concept was essential for Badu Arab settlers (Edwards, Brian, Sibley, Hakmi, Land, 2006 p 3-20).

As hospitality is also integral in both pre Islamic Arab culture and Islamic teachings, a place for the gathering of men and for reception of guests existed in most courtyard houses within Arab Muslim cities. This place may have a different name, and may have been achieved in a different method, but it was created as a response for a similar need and used for a similar function. The traditional courtyard houses, including a male guest room, were a product of divers influences.

A comparative study between courtyard houses within Arab Muslim cities will

focus on the availability of majlis and how the majlis was achieved as a space.

Majlis (Arabic مجلس , plural. مجالس Majālis), is an Arabic term meaning “a place of sitting”. It shares its root with the verb meaning ‘to sit,’ جلس jalasa. It is used in the context of council to describe different types of gatherings among common interest groups such as administrative, social, and religious in countries with linguistic connections to Arabic or cultural connections to Islam. The majlis may refer to a legislature as well as being in the names of legislative councils or congresses in some of the states where Islamic religion dominates. The term majlis is used to refer to a private place where guest are received and entertained, and for important occasions such as Eid, marriage, or death. Different names for the majlis are used in different countries.

In this context the majlis is referring to the male reception areas within the houses. There were however female reception areas; some were dedicated for the purpose of receiving female guests only in wealthy regions and families, but mostly the women were received in

the family quarters and not in a specific, dedicated space within the house. Commonly, houses included areas that were sometimes used by the family, but were created and located within the house to be able to receive and entertain male guests whilst maintaining the required privacy level.

The comparative study will show examples of the physical implementation of Islamic and social values focusing on three different examples of courtyard houses within three different regions in the Arab Muslim world: houses of Aleppo, Syria; houses of Cairo, Egypt; and houses of Fez, Morocco. Comparisons will focus on the male guest areas and their context. It is important to highlight that most courtyard houses share a modest external appearance.

Nonetheless, their size and level of internal ornamentation depends on the wealth of the occupants. This is partially due to the consideration of neighbors and not being ostentatious. In general there are three categories of houses: large courtyard houses of rulers and rich families, medium-sized houses of the middle class of small traders and

craftsmen, and small and humble houses of the workers. While this project targets the middle class within the Arab Gulf, most of the remaining examples studied of courtyard houses are of rich families.





## 4.2.1

The courtyard houses of  
Syria- Aleppo

There may not be a single Islamic architecture, and there may not be an archetypal Islamic town other than a town evolved through development by Muslims. Nevertheless, there are still characteristics derived from Islamic teachings and based on prior Greek and Roman examples, which have given towns certain attributes. An Islamic town and its urban form can be thought to be within these frames. The courtyard was central to most traditional houses within a Muslim Arab city. The model of the courtyard is evident in both rural and urban areas of the hot climate regions from the shores of the Arabian Gulf in the East to the shores of the Atlantic in the West. Muslims have embraced the courtyard concept because it has provided a proper solution to their religious and social needs with regard to privacy and hospitality requirements. The courtyard houses utilized the natural resources appropriately, and the courtyard concept is suitable to hot dry climates, as it increases shading and creates a desirable microclimate. The incorporation of internal plantation and a water feature in certain regions benefits cooling and humidifying the internal space. The construction technique provided suitable thermal mass. The provision of cooling towers

allowed for good summer ventilation. The external passageways and streets leading to the houses were narrow which helped in creating a cool and shaded outdoor environment. The locally available building materials have greatly influenced the construction and shape of the courtyard house.

Religious, social, and cultural factors have played an important role in the shaping of the courtyard house. In addition to the treatment of the entrance and external windows, the required privacy levels influenced internal organization of spaces and separation between family and guest areas within the house. Additionally, the extended family structure created the need for internal expansion while maintaining strong family ties. Entertaining guests and relatives was an important element, which both strengthened family and neighborly ties and impacted the design. (Edwards, et al., 2006 p 3-20).



## 4.2.1.1

The courtyard houses of  
Syria- Aleppo

Generally the traditional courtyard is composed of three main parts: a basement floor used for the storage of food supplies and as a living area in times of extreme winter or summer temperatures; slamlek, a ground floor comprising all the main living and guest areas, the kitchen and toilets; haramlek, a first floor comprising all the private areas. The word haramlek is derived from Turkish, meaning a women's section in the house.

Access to the houses is through a small, simple wooden door; the entrance door typically leads to a narrow corridor ending with another door or a curtain that screens the entrance to the courtyard, permitting the courtyards to be visually completely private from the outside, even if the entrance door is left open. The small size of the external doors and the lack of decoration on the external small plain windows is a demonstration of modesty. Hence it is difficult to appraise the level of wealth of the house occupants from the external appearance. This represents a consideration for neighbors and the broader society, and the adherence to discouraging ostentation. The contrast in spatial experience, from

a modest entrance to a decorated courtyard with intricately woven geometric patterns and shapes and a central fountain, marks the transition from the outside to the inside. Landscaping is evident in the courtyard of the traditional Syrian house. It serves two main purposes: decorative, where climbing jasmine and rose bushes are used to add color and scent, and functional, where, for example, citrus trees are planted for food.

The iwan is a covered open space typically located at the north elevation of the courtyard to take advantage of the cool air during summer. The iwan is a platform raised by one or two steps, framed by a decorative façade and stone arch facing the courtyard; the iwan includes two symmetrical rooms facing each other. It is used as an open air seating area and a space for evening events. Facing the iwan is the main guest hall, which is used for ceremonies and festivals such as Eid. The main guest hall has the most and the best ornamentation in the house and is furnished with the best furniture items. In some houses, a dome covers the main guest hall. These two areas represent the majlis space within traditional Syrian

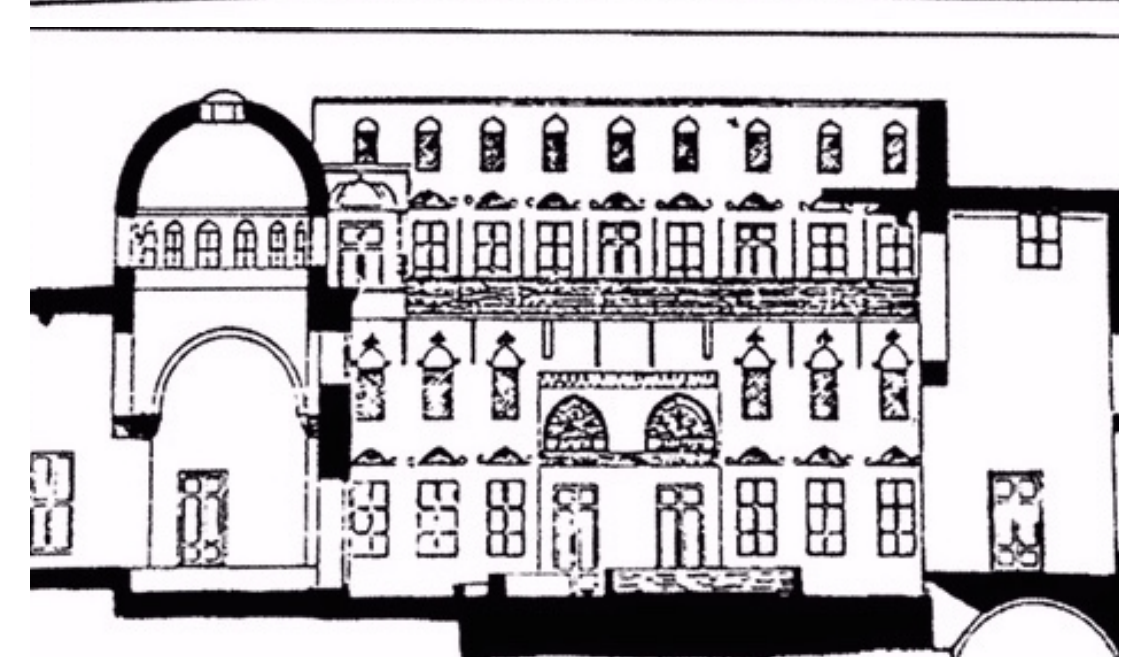
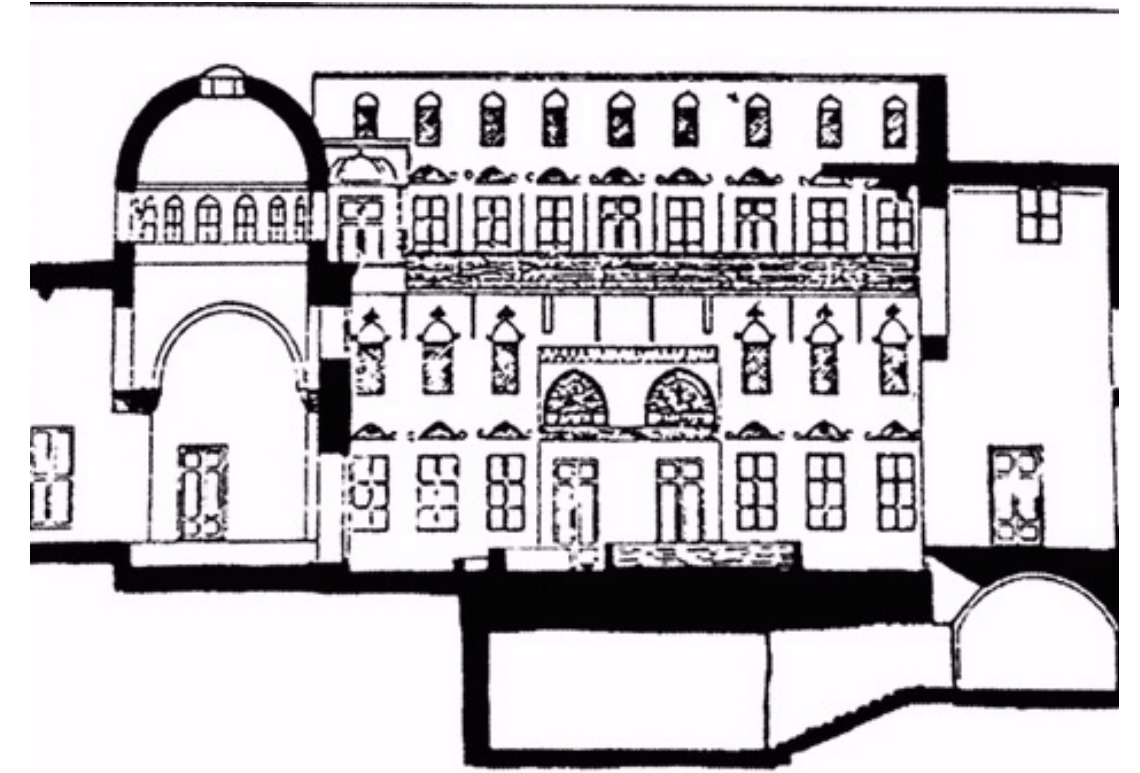
houses; however, the family and women guests utilize these areas in the absence of men.

A staircase located in the courtyard provides access from the ground floor to the first floor. In addition to the sleeping and living areas, the first floor sometimes contains terraces, allowing the sun to shine on the courtyard. High parapet walls, to provide sufficient privacy, typically surround the roof spaces. Mashrabiyya is another important method, which is utilized to cover openings to create the required level of privacy as well as to achieve thermal comfort in a house. The name originates from the Arabic root, sharab, to drink. The wooden screen that covers windows provides privacy for the household by allowing the family to view public spaces without being seen. It is also used as a climate control device to minimize the heat caused by direct sunlight during the summer.

Water jars are kept behind or in front of the mashrabiyya, hence this name. The windows overlooking the courtyard are much larger and are more decorated in comparison to the external windows,

which are small and plain. The internal windows provide light and ventilation to the rooms. The external windows are located on the first floor upwards to avoid exposure to pedestrians in the streets. As for the decoration and ornamentation, the availability of stone in Aleppo made it the main building material; walls are commonly formed by layers of white and black stones called Al-Ablaq, which forms a distinctive characteristic of the courtyard houses of Syria.

The ground floor guest areas are the most decorated. In the main reception hall, the walls are sometimes covered with wooden panels with calligraphy carvings complementing the built-in cabinet design used to display intricate wooden ornamental carvings. In the main reception hall, where the ceiling is the highest in the house, symmetrically composed ceilings are highly decorated with rich carving and gold-plated wooden panels. Multicolored stone inlays form floor, ceiling, and wall decorations, and inter-connecting timber planks are decorated with calligraphy, floral patterns, animal derived patterns, and geometric patterns (Edwards, et al., eds. 2006, 31-38).



## 4.2.1.2

The courtyard house of  
Egypt – Cairo

Unlike many other old Islamic Arab cities, the Cairene courtyard house cannot be regarded as the main pattern of urban framework. The study of the spatial and social arrangements of old Cairo shows that the house typology is based on the distribution of different social groups within the city (Wright, 1991). Nonetheless, the courtyard can be considered as an organizational unit representing three traditional house types. The first type is that of houses with central courtyards, which were usually occupied by the wealthy community of Egyptian society.

Originally this type developed from the traditional Islamic house, and was modified at a later stage by the Ottoman and European styles. This type was utilized until it was superseded by the Western prototypes in the late 19th / early 20th century. The second type is a house with side or front courtyards. The difference between this type and houses with central courtyards is in the functional use of the courtyard as a living space. The third type is a house without a courtyard. This type may have included a courtyard, but it functioned as a light well or ventilation shaft, whereas the main spaces were

opened to the street instead of overlooking the courtyard. Most studies have focused on the traditional, residential architecture of Cairo from the late Mamluk period (1259 – 1517) and throughout the Ottoman period (1517 – 1805) (Salama, 2006).

Generally the traditional courtyard houses of Cairo were similar to the ones in Aleppo, as they were composed of two zones, haramlek and slamlek, arranged as two or three stories. In addition to these two areas, the houses included the manafi', which means services, comprising latrines, kitchen, storage, and the servants' rooms if any. Entrances mostly opened onto secondary streets or cul-de-sacs, with indirect corridors providing access to interior courtyards that were hidden from outside view. The house was accessed by a door through a majaz, a vestibule followed by a corridor. The majaz was planned to open onto a blank wall to shield the house from the view of passing people; it was formed with one or two turnings, so that the visitor's view into the interior of the house was also blocked in order to preserve the privacy of the family. At the same time, the

doorway was functional and modest, as ostentation was discouraged according to the teachings of Islam. Al-Suhaymi house, Cairo, 1648, is a good example, which expresses the relationship between the main entrance and the courtyard. The first turning has two doors, the main entrance door and an intermediate door perpendicular to it; this door prevents direct view and access to the courtyard and provides protection from dust, wind, and the noise of the outside. The courtyard is accessed, through the second turning, by an arch, and is perpendicular to the intermediate door (Salama 2006).

The traditional courtyard houses were designed with an inward-looking plan with plain external walls to discourage strangers from looking inside, the houses are introverted, where the family looked into a courtyard rather than looking out upon the street. However, the size and number of the courtyards varied according to the available space and resources. They contained most of the entrances, including the entrance to the haramlek. In early Arab houses in Cairo, the salamlek courtyard also created a transitional space between the entrance and the guest area.

In the early Arab houses in Cairo, meeting casual male visitors took place in the takhtabush, which means hayat -life- in Anatolian, is a loggia—a covered outdoor sitting area at the ground floor level with a side opening to the courtyard to receive the male visitors. This was mainly found in big courtyard houses of the Ottoman domestic architecture of Cairo. It was usually flat-roofed with a facade opening onto the courtyard. The takhtabush was located in a way that did not allow the exposure of private spaces to the guests. Important male visitors usually entered from the courtyard to another reception hall with a higher central space, which was bordered by two spaces at a slightly higher level.

In the Mamluk period in the twelfth century, the style of houses changed; this change included covering the courtyard, and the introduction of the qa'ah as the main reception hall. Qa'ah is a room that consisted of two elevated areas, known as iwans (three-walled areas with a ceiling), opposing each other and overlooking a lower area called the durqa'a, which is a covered, small court (sahn). The Durqa'a is usually topped with a shokhshek-

ha—wooden lantern ceiling. Qa'ah was found in houses on ground floors mainly for male reception and first floors in the haramlek. The wooden lantern skylight was a source of light and air in the qa'ah, the openings in the lantern allowing the hot air to escape. The shape of the lantern varied between square, octagonal, or hexagonal; however it was also flat on the top, to help the upper layer of air to be heated through exposure to the sun. For extra ventilation there was a wind catcher or malqaf, a shaft usually constructed on the north iwan, rising above the building with an opening facing the prevailing wind. Muslims believe that there is a spring of water in heaven called Salsabil, meaning 'fresh sweet water'. Salsabil is a source of water from a marble plate decorated with wavy patterns; it was introduced to increase the humidity of the air coming from the malqaf. It was located against the wall of the opposite side of the iwan and placed at an angle to allow the water to seep over (El-Shorbagy, 2010).

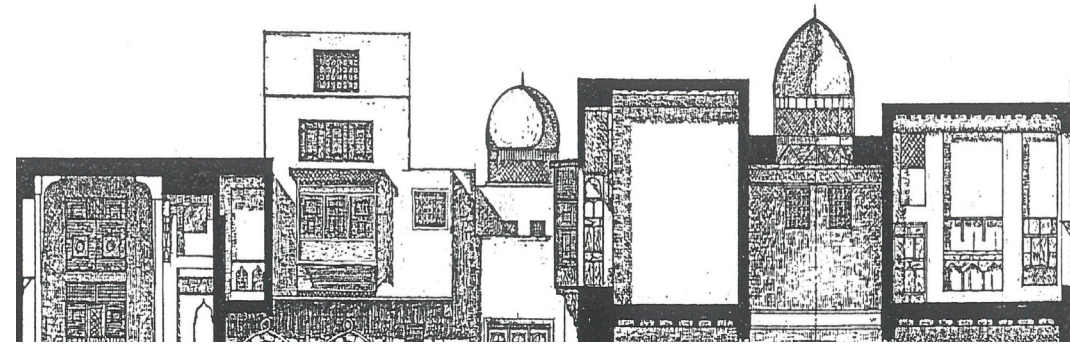
Located on the upper floors, haramlek comprised one or more wings, each with its own living and sleeping spaces.

Maka'ad, a rectangular or square shaped covered loggia, opened with its full facade onto the courtyard, oriented to the north to take advantage of the breeze. The maka'ad was usually located on the first floor, accessible directly from the courtyard by a staircase and a corridor, and connected to a sleeping area or reception area. It functioned as a space for the daily-life activities of the family—the household master, children, and relatives but rarely for women. The maka'ad of the courtyard traditional houses was of a smaller scale in comparison to other spaces. It was used to receive male members of the family and their close relatives or friends. During the era of Mohamed Ali, the name of maka'ad was changed into maeisha and sometimes referred to as a seating area.

Mashrabiyyas were installed between the haramlek and salamlek, haramlek and courtyard, and haramlek and street to provide the required privacy to the haramlek allowing women to see these areas without being seen. Mashrabiyyah can be found in medieval houses in Cairo, such as Gamal Al-Din Al-Dahabi House 1637, and Zeinab Khatoun House, 14th century.



As for decoration and ornamentation, the ground floor guest areas were the most decorated, focusing on the guest areas. Combinations of wood and stone with calligraphy, floral patterns, animal derived patterns, and geometric patterns were used. Applied color rarely appeared in Islamic-Arab houses; the colors were the natural colors of the materials.



### 4.2.1.3

The courtyard house of Morocco- Fez

Medina of Fez is one of the rare cities of the Arab Muslim world that succeeded to survive in mostly its original shape, where the entire original residential quarter is still lived in. The city still has clusters of modest courtyard houses and great elaborate courtyard houses of wealthy families. The original features of the Fassi house began to develop with the Idrissid dynasty (The first Arab dynasty in Morocco 788-923); these features continued to develop during the Merenid dynasty (1248-1465) and achieved full development during the Alaouite dynasty (1669-present). The typology of the courtyard houses of Fez continued to be the same from the fourteenth century until the nineteenth century. The organizational principles of both the modest courtyard houses and the large courtyard palaces are the same; the house size and the degree of decoration are the only indicators of the level of wealth of the courtyard houses' occupants.

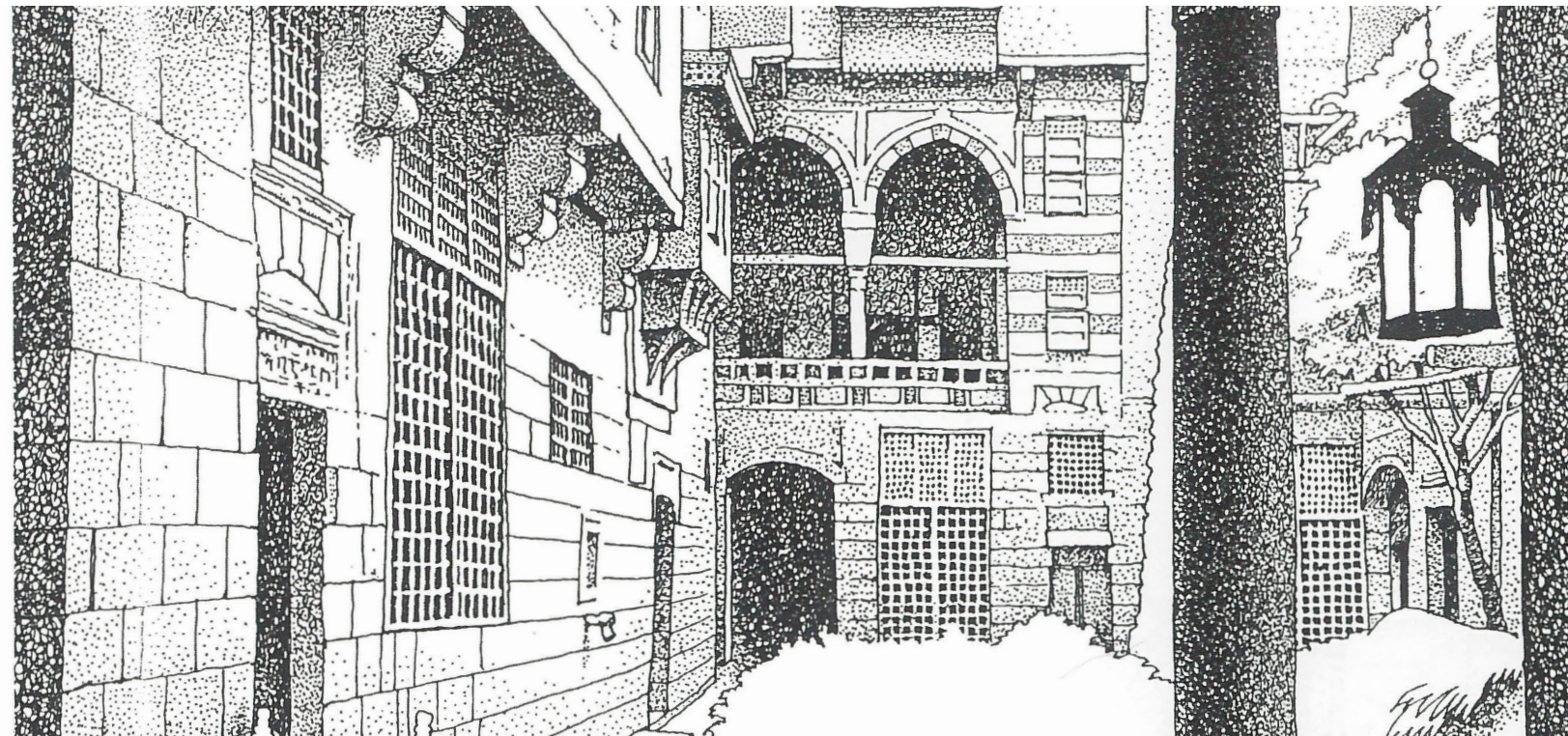
Generally the traditional courtyard houses of Fez were composed of three stories with intermediate levels. The ground floor was usually called sufli, which means the lower part, and the first floor

was called Ifouqi which means the upper. Their verticality and their deep courtyards characterize courtyard houses in Fez. The courtyard had an average height of 11.5 meters, and average length ranging between 6 to 10 meters. Entrances to the dar (house) were mostly indirect and there were always one or two sets of inner doors at the entrance to maintain the desired level of privacy and security. Bab-i-dar, the house door, consisted of a large wooden door that was rarely used and a smaller door integrated in the larger door for daily use.

The door had two iron kharsa (door-knockers), one high for guests on horseback and a lower one for pedestrian guests. The main door was decorated with modest linear or geometric carvings and had large round nails attaching wooden boards to the inner doorframe. The door opened on a rectangular corridor referred to as 'stwan which led to the sufli. The ground floor consisted of a large and spacious courtyard (wust-i-dar). The courtyard usually included a central and/or a wall fountain (saqaiya) made of small enameled ceramic tiles (zellij) and was surrounded by many

rooms. The biggest room was dedicated for guests, and the lbartal, the smallest room, was an open multi-purposes space with no door. Lbartal occupies an important position in the home's courtyard, as it was used for special celebrations. Furthermore, it was considered as a good place to have a quiet time for worship or writing. The lbartal was specially decorated, the ceiling being covered with carved and painted wood and the walls covered with zellij.

The courtyard was usually surrounded with two narrow salons (beit, pl. biyout) facing each other. The salons had high ceilings, which were carved and painted, and fitted with low, embroidered cushions around the border. These salons were utilized for different purposes such as daily sitting and dining in addition to sleeping. The salons had few or no windows overlooking the street; in older houses there would be no windows of any kind; the rooms were fitted with two large doors with smaller doors integrated within them (bab b-dfaf). The doors were typically carved and painted with geometric and floral decorations. In summer, the large doors remained open and embroi-





dered or crocheted curtains were used for privacy; in winter, the large doors were closed and the smaller doors were used. As for salons with windows, the openings were fitted with decorative iron grills and painted wooden shutters; frequently semi-circular stained-glass windows were installed above the larger windows. The ground floor also contained a kitchen (kuchina) , toilet, and sometimes a Turkish bath (hammam) in the bigger houses. It is worth mentioning that even in the 12th century most Fez houses had running water flowing through terracotta pipes.

The first floor lfouqi, was reached by the stairs, which got light through an opening called lmenkash. The staircases were placed in strategic corners of the building without being exposed to the courtyard. There were several small rooms with low ceilings in-between the main floors, which were used for storage. Some houses had a small room with a discreet window, allocated for women, so they could look out when there were male strangers in the house. The first floor comprised many sleeping and living rooms facing each other and they all looked down

into the sufli. In old houses, mashrabyya covered the four sides creating a balcony (darbouz) overlooking the courtyard. Some houses had a kitchen and toilet in the first floor, to accommodate the extended family members. Some houses had a second floor or a second fouqi, which contained, like the first floor, many rooms.

The terrace was located on the roof level; older houses had high walls to provide privacy, as this space was the domain of women only until very recently. Some houses had lmenzeh which was another large salon used for entertaining special guests. Lmenzeh is usually the most elaborately decorated room in the house, with a carved and painted ceiling, stained-glass windows made of carved plaster, and windows providing a panoramic view of the mountains, gardens, and medina. It was common for the families to sleep on the roof on very hot summer days.

Some of the historical Fassi houses are connected by a small apartment, a guest-house called lmesria, which has its own entrance. It was used to accommodate young single men of the family or to host

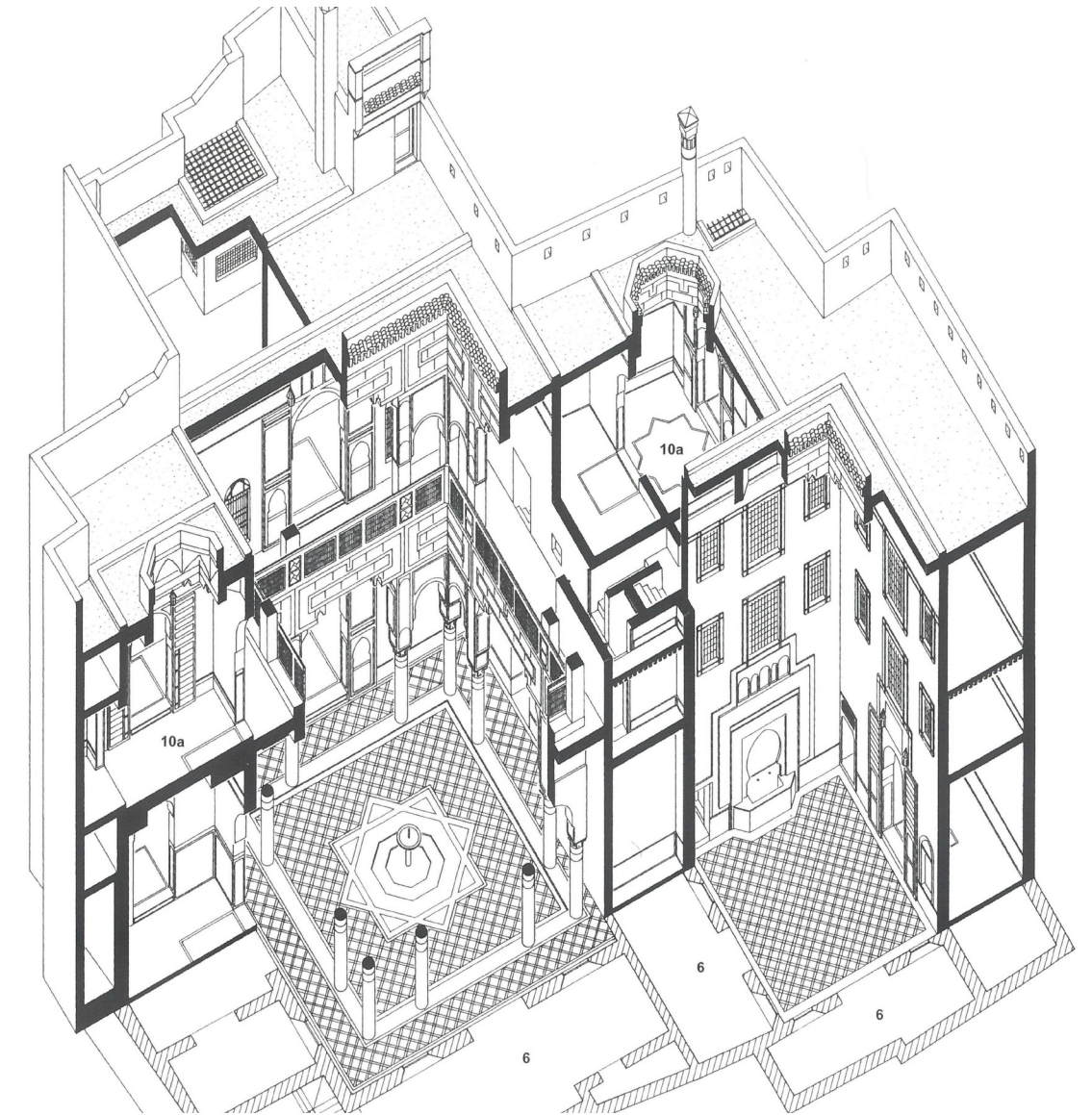
male guests; it was provided to allow for the privacy of both the guest and the house occupants. There were other types of courtyard houses, such as dwira (the diminutive of dar), which is a small house, often with a small courtyard, only one salon downstairs, and one upstairs. Riad which means gardens in Arabic, is a house with a garden in the center, usually with orange and lemon trees; some riad are created by a U-shaped house with the garden on the fourth side. Many riad have salons only on one level, to provide more light for the garden. And finally there is the kasr, which means a palace, which is usually a very large courtyard house.

As for the materials and finishes, the walls of houses were made of lime (jeer), sand, (raml), and bricks (liyajoor bel-di). Cedar (ilerz) was used to create the support beams, doors, and windows. The walls were finished with medluk, a material made of a mixture of extremely fine sand, lime, egg white, and a traditional soft soap made from olive, sabon beldi . Aging medluk provided a marbled effect over time. Sometimes simple geometric patterns were pressed or carved into the medluk. Zellij, the traditional,

locally-made terracotta tiles were utilized in many areas of the house. There were several finishes, sizes, shapes, and colors of traditional zellij tile. The main traditional colors used were black, white, green, blue, and yellow-ochre.

Simply designed zellij was used on the floors of all rooms, and on the borders on the walls around the room. The more decorative zellij, sometimes with calligraphy, was used for special areas such as the entrance and the guest areas. A mix of marble and zellij was used in luxurious houses. The interior walls were covered with unpainted and simple plaster gyps. Carved decorative plaster was used above and around doors and windows and as a border below the ceiling.

Natural colors, similar to the ones used in the zellij, and wood were applied to highlight the decorative designs or the calligraphy only (Edwards, et al., 2006, p 53-60).



Traditional houses within Arab Muslim cities showed an understanding of the principles of composition, resulting in planned and satisfying arrangements of building elements, functionally and visually. Hierarchies were fundamental in the design process of the house, and contributed to the different levels of articulation of the interior and exterior of a building. Using tools such as scale, proportion, balance, and contrast enhanced the character of the building. The design provided consideration of human perception and scale, which enabled people to understand the elements of the buildings and use them comfortably. Respect and integration with the surrounding environment were other important factors in the design process.

The house within Arab Muslim cities is perceived not as an object only but as an object expressing the functions of the different areas within the house and the identity of each member. The understated characteristics of the houses within Islamic-Arab societies resulted from a range of elements that were adopted or created to respond to religious, social, and culture needs.

Although spaces and architectural elements were given different names in different areas, the use of them together created a recognized language of the domestic architecture. The use and design of elements of courtyard houses, such as domes, vaults, bearing walls, wind catchers, space and gender segregation, were based on providing solutions to people’s religious and cultural requirements, and construction methods were based on, and responded to, the surrounding environment. The arrangement of all spaces around an inner courtyard and the division of domestic space into two zones, which in Cairo and Aleppo related to the separation of the sexes, were called haramlek and salamlek due to the direct impact of the Ottoman Empire. In Fez, which was impacted by Andalusia more than the Ottomans, these two zones were called suflî and fauqî. While the gender segregation level varied between these cities and was based on the interpretation of religion by the ruling empire or dynasty, economic conditions, and social and cultural circumstances, they all had allocated male guest areas; the female guests or the family may have used these areas in the absence of the male guests. However,

these areas served a role of maintaining the hospitality values, strengthening the ties between people, passing knowledge to the younger generation, and teaching them the principles of manhood. In the male guest area each country had its own traditions of hospitality that were inspired by the local culture. The serving of food or drinks was based on the regional culture more than Islamic teachings. While Islam encourages the hosts to be hospitable, it never identifies what should be served or how to serve it.

Most of the male guest areas were located in the ground floors, with any easy access from the main door, with the exclusion of lemnzleh on the roof, in Fez. Another meeting place outside the houses in these countries, mainly Fez and Aleppo, were Hammams and Mosques. The concept of gender separation created the need to create different privacy levels; these were achieved by different design solutions, such as bent or indirect entrances, to not allow passing people to look into the house; this also applied to guests who used to wait behind the wall to be given permission to enter the house. Space was allocated within the house by creating family and guests

zones, while the public areas were mainly utilized by men. The family and private areas were the domain of women, and the location of male guest areas were in the public areas of the house. Privacy screens, Mashrabiyya, were utilized to cover openings to create the required level of privacy as well as to achieve thermal comfort in a house. They provided privacy for the household by allowing the family to see the street, and sometimes women to see the male allocated areas within the house while restricting pedestrians and guests from viewing the inside of the house. The house design adopted different levels of privacy to address dressing codes and rules of interaction, and to create a space, which both genders could utilize comfortably. Hence the first design virtue is identified as privacy: privacy of the family with all its members, privacy of the visitors, and privacy of neighbors and the street.

Privacy was a fundamental factor that impacted the shape and the plan form of almost all traditional Muslim houses, to clearly define public, semi-public, and private spaces within the house. The cultural and religious emphasis on visual privacy in Islamic communities, in

addition to the climate conditions, has impacted decisions in creating certain designs to achieve the different levels of privacy.

The courtyard concept was not only utilized to achieve the privacy requirements but it also responded to climatic, environmental, and cultural factors. The courtyard was used as a method to enhance the thermal comfort inside a house. The courtyard was an efficient device to create air movement by convection. The four walls that surrounded the courtyard provided shade; the air would heat gradually and remain cool until late in the day. Other elements, such as provision of water within the house and adding wind catchers, helped to improve the climatic conditions. Mashrabiyya was also utilized as a device to control the climate by minimizing the heat of the direct sunlight. It was also used as a water-cooling device with water jars usually kept behind or in front of the mashrabiyya.

The mashrabiyyah had five functions that were sometimes achieved totally or sometimes in part. These functions were: regulating the airflow, decreasing the

temperature of the airflow, increasing the humidity of the airflow, regulating the passage of light, and creating privacy. While design of the houses was based on similar principles, each region had its own stylistic characteristics, from Al-Ablaq in Aleppo to zellij in Fez. The houses utilized local, available materials and followed existing architectural forms.

The different climate control methods were used collectively or partially in the different houses within Arab Muslim cities, and the utilization of local materials and techniques resulted in a different aesthetic approach in each region. The implementation of these methods varied from one region to another as the design responded specificity to the local context. Hence the house belonged to its environmental and cultural context in its style and belonged to Islamic architecture in its values—that is, being contextual in its own environment and culture.

The courtyard houses had few to no windows overlooking the street and apart from emphasizing the main entrance, concentrated on the interior rather than the exterior of a building. Hence, this was



named the architecture of the veil. Part of Islamic teachings is to respect neighbors and to show unpretentiousness and not to be ostentatious; the wealth of the home owner in Muslim cities is known by the size and interior design only. While the interiors of some houses were highly decorated, the decoration concentrated mainly on formal guest areas, as hospitality features highly in the culture. Most of the internal decorations resulted from Islamic belief regarding figurative art; hence Islamic art flourished within the limitations of abstraction. Decorative art comprised four types of patterns: calligraphy centered on verses of the holy Qur'an or poetry, floral patterns originated from stems and leaves of various plants, patterns derived from animal forms, and geometric patterns derived from the combination of circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles.

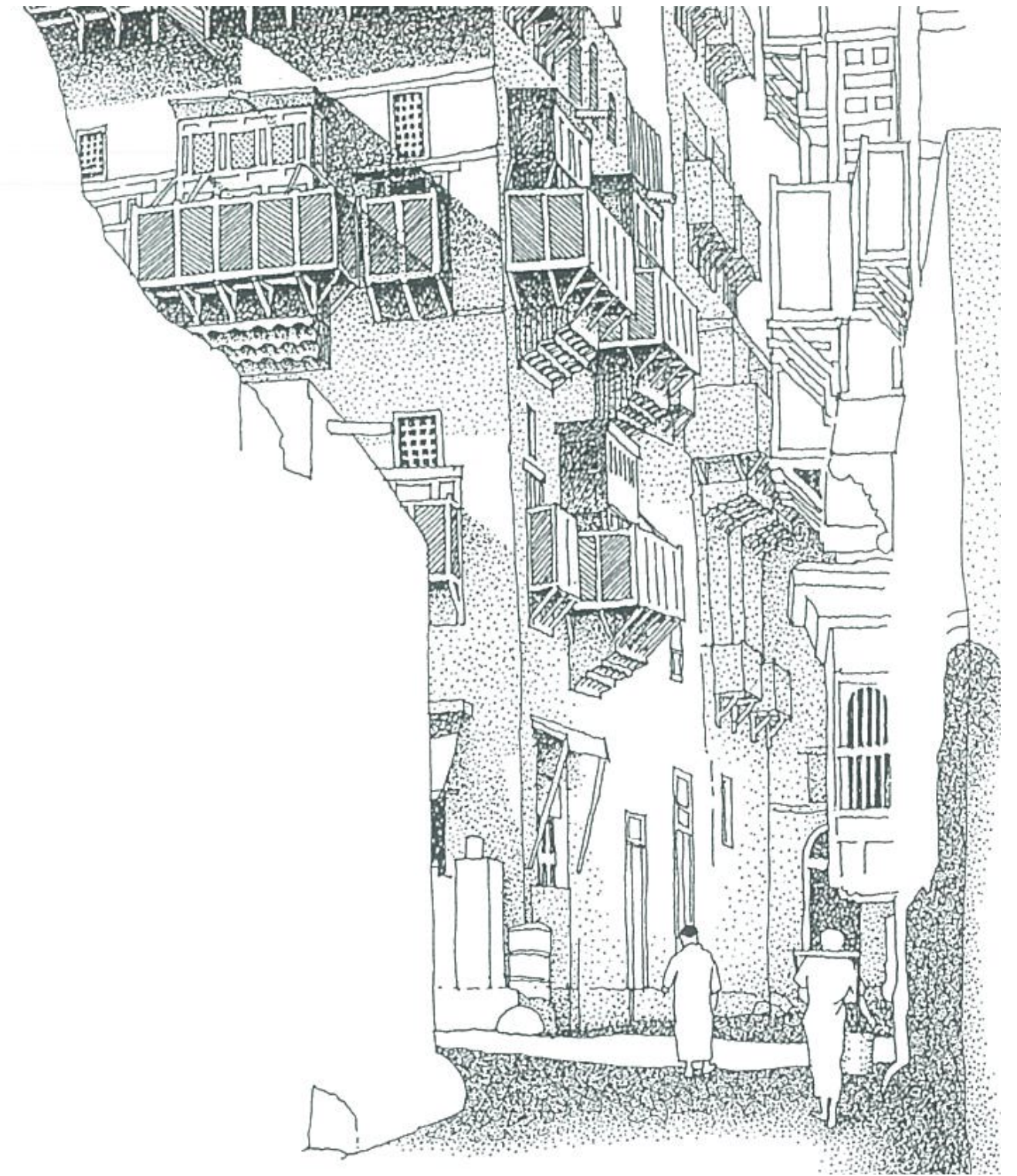
Applied color is seldom seen in houses within Islamic Arab cities. The utilized colors are the natural colors of materials and finishes, which identify both the origins of the architecture and its connection to the surrounding landscape. The use of a homogeneous single color accentuated the basic building form.

The dominant factor in the courtyard houses was the use of light and its effect on materials. The dynamic contrast of shade and light played dramatically on the different features. Shadows were cast over the rhythmic colonnades or entered through a patterned window cover evoking an expressive shadow. All these minimal and functional elements accentuate the shape of the interior. The simplicity of design was expressed in the simplicity of layout and forms, priorities of proportion, the usage of light, and rhythmic layering. Hence, one of the common factors between the houses of the three cities is simplicity of exterior and forms and concentration on the interiors. The design of houses in these three cities, along with many other Arab Muslim cities, has changed throughout time. One of these changes applied to the allocation of a separate male guest area within the houses of these cities.

The combined impact of Spanish, French and British colonization and feminist movements, in addition to economic conditions and the fact that women started to work outside the home, resulted in major social and cultural changes that impacted the design of

the house. It is important to note that the levels of gender separation varied in different regions of Muslim cities. While in some cultures original houses had total separation, others had a partial separation. The approach to privacy, and by extension to the design of the house and male guest areas was based on preexisting cultures and religions.

Interim events, such as mixing with people of Andalusia (Morocco) who were more open due to their proximity to Europe, and to later colonization by the French and the Spanish, and improvements in economic conditions and communications, resulted in the availability of smaller areas or apartments. These did not allow for dedicated special spaces for male guests; no gender separation required no allocation of a special space; the same is applicable to Egypt and Syria. These areas have been replaced with a salon for both genders or with a family room.



# 4.3

## Arabian Gulf

Geographically, the Arabian Peninsula is located in Asia and consists of Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates as well as parts of southern Iraq and Jordan. The Arabian Peninsula is surrounded by the Levant to the north and Indian Ocean to the southeast, the Red Sea to the west, and the Arabian Gulf to the northeast. Historically, the Arabian Peninsula was divided into four regions: Hejaz and Najd which are part of modern Saudi Arabia, Sothern Arabia which consisted of Yemen and parts of Saudi Arabia and Oman ( Dhofar), and Eastern Arabia which consisted of the entire coastal strip on the Arab side of the Arabian Gulf<sup>8</sup>. The peninsula is formed mainly of desert, but there are mountain ranges in the southwest, which receive rainfall greater than the rest of the Arabian Peninsula (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, “Arabia”).

The focus of this chapter will be on the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, consisting of six countries Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman. These countries identify themselves as not only being geographically contiguous,

they also show a high degree of cultural and religious homogeneity as they are connected by religion, history, origin, and culture. This is true with regard to some of the countries more than others, and these countries share some similarities with other countries in the Arabian Peninsula as well. For the purpose of this paper, these countries will be referred to as the Arabian Gulf. This chapter will also address relations and impacts of the Persian side of the Arabian Gulf (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, “Arabia”).

# 4.3.1

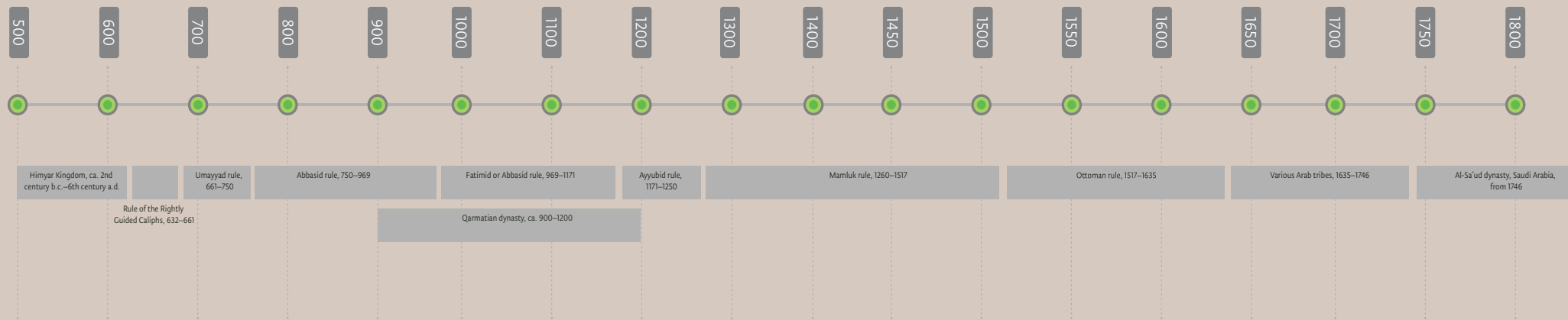
## Historic Context

Today, the Arabian Gulf fulfills an important geopolitical role in the Middle East mainly due to its huge reserves of oil and natural gas. The majority of the Arabian Gulf population lives in Saudi Arabia, which covers the larger part of the peninsula. Most of the Arabian Gulf is covered with desert sand that is estimated to extend 180 meters deep. Temporary watercourses, called wadies, which are usually dry except during the rainy season, cover most of the Arabian Gulf areas. However, some areas have fertile valleys and pastures that are used for grazing. The more fertile areas are located in parts of Saudi Arabia, such as Najd, and other countries, such as

Oman, as well as parts of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

The Arabian Gulf includes ranges of mountains in Hejaz and Oman, stretches of dry or marshy coastland with coral reefs on the Red Sea side of Saudi Arabia, and oases and marshy coastland in Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. The Arabian Gulf contains two of the largest oases in the world, Al-Hasa and Al Qatif, which are located in Saudi Arabia. These oases are formed above ancient aquifers, which allow for some limited agriculture—mainly palm trees—and the presence of desert-adapted wildlife throughout the region. The

Arabian Gulf water is generally a tropical sea with rich tropical sea life. The climate of the Arabian Gulf is extremely arid and hot; areas with a higher altitude have a cooler climate, and coastal areas have a cooler, humid climate during the summer (Hawker, 2008). The archaeological findings show that human habitation in the Arabian Peninsula dates back to 10,000 to 20,000 years ago. Nevertheless, the harsh climate prevented large settlements. In the pre-Islamic Arabian Gulf, apart from a small number of trading town settlements (such as Mecca and Medina) located in Hejaz, most of the areas were uninhabitable desert or inhabited



<sup>8</sup> Also known as the Persian Gulf



only by nomadic tribes. However, many civilizations called the Arabian Peninsula home before Islam: the Himyarite Kingdom, the Kingdom of Awsan, the Kingdom of Main, and the Sabaeen Kingdom in South Arabia; the Kingdom of Kinda in Central Arabia; and the Kingdom of Dilmun in Eastern Arabia (Hawker, 2008). The types of pre-Islamic religion in Arabian Gulf Arabia consisted of indigenous polytheism, and some Nestorian Christianity and Judaism due to their trading with Yemen and the Levant. The area was bordered by the Persian Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. The location of the Arabian Peninsula as the crossroads of three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe, created beneficial trading centers mainly on the coastal areas. Also, the oases and larger towns such as Mecca and Medina became often-used stops for travelers.

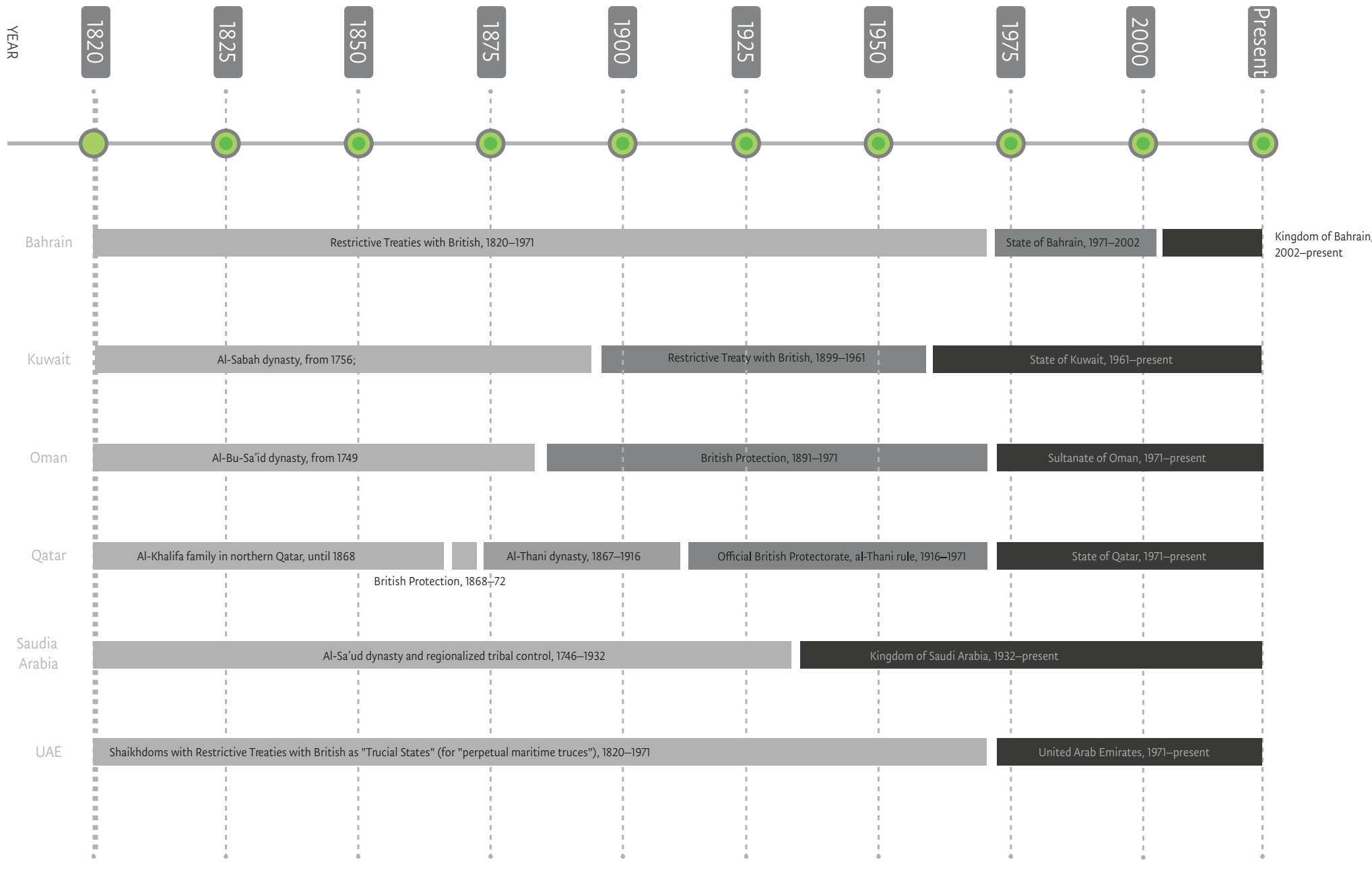
Sea and land routes connected the Arabian Peninsula to major trade centers. The trade routes spanned from the southern tip of the peninsula to the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire to the north, and they were used by the Arabs for trading as well as for what were known as summer and winter trips.

Camel caravans carried products and inventions via these routes. Merchants traded metals, textiles, crops, animals, and spices such as pepper and saffron. Trade also provided an opportunity for cultural exchange. Merchants transmitted information as well as products. Judaism and Christianity were spread this way, and there were well-known Christian, Arab, and Jewish tribes (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, “Arabia”). In the seventh century, a new unified political religion, Islam, was introduced to the Arabian Gulf during the prophet Mohammed peace be upon him time (610-632) and spread under the subsequent caliphates ( 632-661) to create an Islamic Empire well beyond the Arabian Peninsula. While Mecca and Medina remained the most spiritually important places in the Muslim world, the political focus shifted to the new territories in cities such as Damascus, Baghdad, and Cairo.

From the tenth century, the Hashemite sharifs ruled Mecca and Hejaz; these and other Arabian Gulf areas were usually subject to the suzerainty of one of the major Islamic empires of the time. In the Middle Ages, these included the Abbasids

of Baghdad, and the Fatimids, Ayyubid, and Mamluks of Egypt. The Ottoman Empire rule lasted in the Arabian Gulf from 1517 to 1918, eliminating the first and second Saudi states. The Portuguese invaded the Gulf from the start of the sixteenth century, capturing Hormuz and Muscat, and Bahrain, Qatar, Al Hasa, and Al Qatif. The Portuguese were ousted finally from Bahrain in 1602. In 1806, the Wahhabi Islamic reform movement, aided by the Saud family, captured Mecca. This encouraged Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, to invade the Arabian Peninsula. He recaptured Mecca, took their capital of Riyadh, and executed the Saudi leader. However, in 1824, another Saudi leader recaptured Riyadh and founded a new Wahhabi kingdom, which spread to other Arabian Gulf countries. With the encouragement of the British, the Arabian Gulf revolted against the Ottomans—mainly Hejaz ruled by Sharif Hussain during World War I—with the aim to gain their independence.

While some towns and cities gained partial independence, some became part of the British colonies. The people of the Arabian Gulf were mainly nomads, living in tents and moving about in the Arabian



Arabian Gulf people worked in fishing, pearling, building dhows, nomadic herding, camel breeding, date growing, trading, and producing other minor products. Large fishing industries have subsequently been set up in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, and some countries export fish (Hawker, 2008).

Great Britain controlled the majority of the Arabian Gulf and didn't see any gain in developing the area at that time. Great Britain also restricted the international pearl trade to European merchants in

India; hence, the pearls were sold cheaply to Indian merchants. Some of Arab Gulf countries had their own currency, the main currency in the Arabian Gulf was the Indian rupee. The 1930s famine was also partially caused by the collapse of the Gulf pearl trade due to the introduction of the Japanese cultivated pearls; the

Ibn Saud took Najd in 1921, establishing the third Saudi state by 1932. In the

**History of crude oil prices**

Price per barrel, 2013\$

1861-1865 US Civil War drives up commodity prices; tax on competing illuminant raises demand for oil

1865-1890 Prices boom and bust with fluctuations in US drilling

1891-1894 Pennsylvania oilfields begin to decline, setting the stage for higher prices in 1895

1894 Cholera epidemic cuts production in Baku, Azerbaijan, contributing to 1895 spike

1890-1892 Recession and strong production from US and Russia bring prices down

1920 Rapid adoption of the automobile drastically raises oil consumption, leading to the "West Coast Gasoline Famine"

1931 Prices hit record low as onset of Great Depression reduces demand

1937 Post-war automotive boom creates fuel shortages in some US states

1956-1957 Suez crisis takes 10% of world's oil off the market – but production outside of the Middle East stymies a price spike in the interim

1972 US oil production peaks

1973-1974 Arab states institute embargo against countries supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War

1978-1979 Iran cuts production and exports during revolution; cancels contracts with US companies

1980 Iran-Iraq War begins; exports from the region slow further

1980s Demand response to supply shocks pushes prices down

1988 Iran, Iraq increase output with end of war

1990 Arab Spring, civil war disrupts Libyan output

1996 Saudi Arabia increases production to regain market share

1999 Asian demand recovers after 1997 crisis

2001-2003 9/11 and invasion of Iraq raise concerns about Middle East stability; Venezuelan oil workers strike until 1994

2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis

2011 Arab Spring, civil war disrupts Libyan output

2014 YTD avg. Strong non-OPEC production; weak demand growth; OPEC shifts toward maintaining market share

2015 Prices expected to fall further as the market searches for a new equilibrium

Recession

Crude oil prices in 2013 USD/barrel

Note: 2014 YTD average price as of end of December 8, 2014.  
Source for data: BP, International Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

## 4.3.2

### Social / Cultural Connection

The Arabs of the Gulf refer to themselves and shared aspects of their culture as khaleeji, or “of the Gulf” (Nagy 1997). The residents of the Gulf identify with each other based on shared history, kinship, and traditions among many other things.

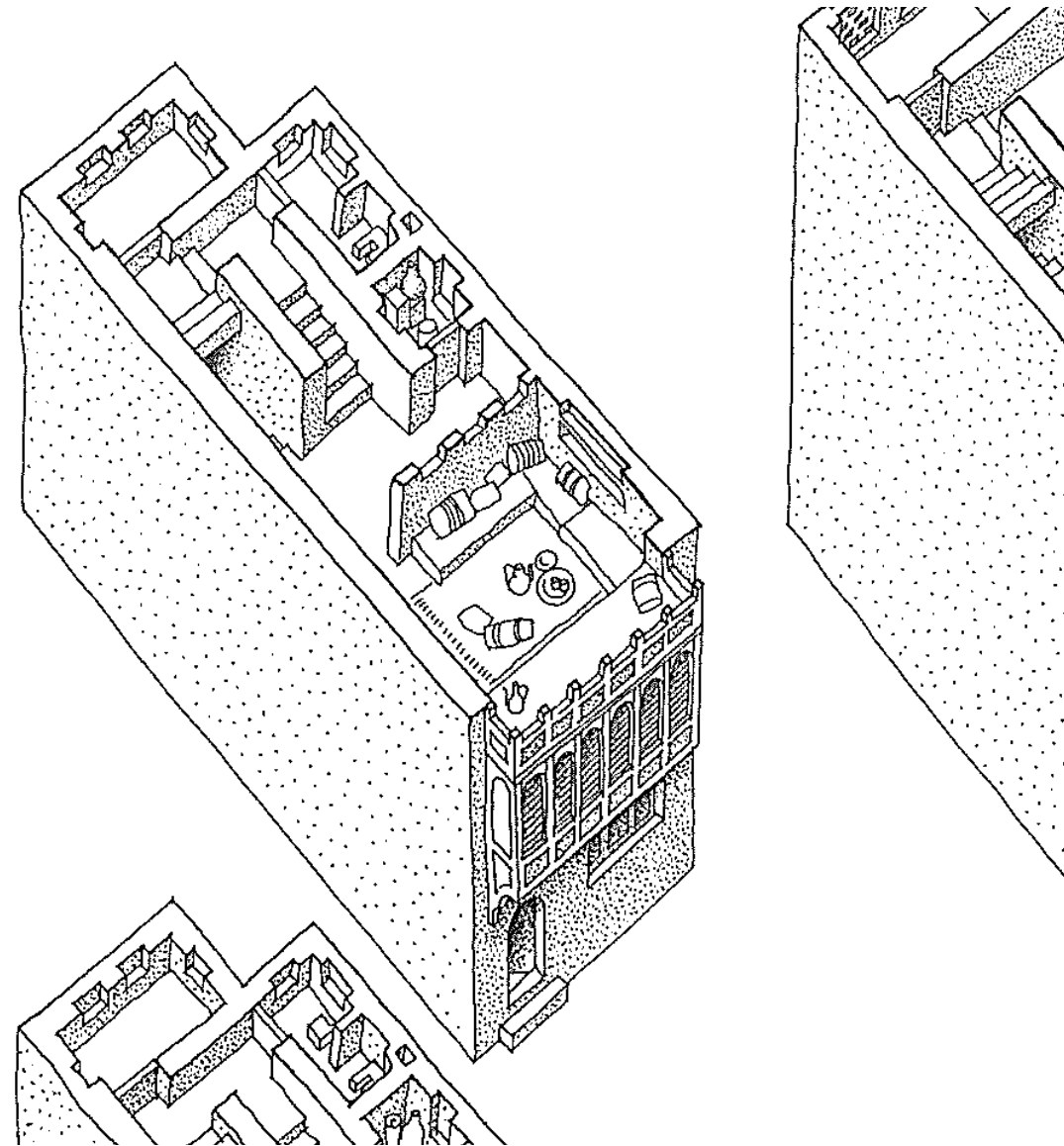
The citizens of the GCC consider themselves both khaleeji and citizens of their own countries as well. Foreigners are divided into categories: an Arab foreigner and non-Arab foreigner, and then a western foreigner and an Asian foreigner, but these categories are also related to level of education and wealth. For example, a Japanese person may be referred to as a “western foreigner”.

The people of the GCC states can be seen differently due to the economic wealth of the majority of the states. The population is predominantly dominated by a Sunni majority and the existence of large numbers of expatriate residents in most of the GCC countries. However, the migration patterns, movement, interrelatedness, and intermarriage among the groups populating the area strengthen the socioeconomic parallels in the region.



## 4.3.3

### Traditional Architecture of the Arabian Gulf



The architecture of the Arabian Gulf developed in the eighth and ninth centuries in response to social, economic, and environmental conditions. Households, mosques, marketplaces, and defense buildings were formed based on interrelated influences of social and cultural factors such as religion and tribal affiliation, economic factors such as trade and availability of a source for living, and environmental factors such as land, climate, and outside powers. Traditional Gulf architecture was simpler than the architecture of other Arab Muslim cities in terms of very modest building materials, and it was dependent on trabeated construction forms. This resulted from both the economic and environmental situation in the area. The vocabulary of building elements focused on achieving environmental controls, shelter, and security (Hawker, 2008).

As highlighted in chapter 4.1, Islamic values in architecture sharia provided the basic principles for domestic architecture and urban planning. Additionally, in the Gulf, people established neighborhoods according to their tribal affiliation and their economic

practices. Hence, stylistic characteristics of house architecture resulted from the complex relationships of tribe, tribal origin, profession, and social class.

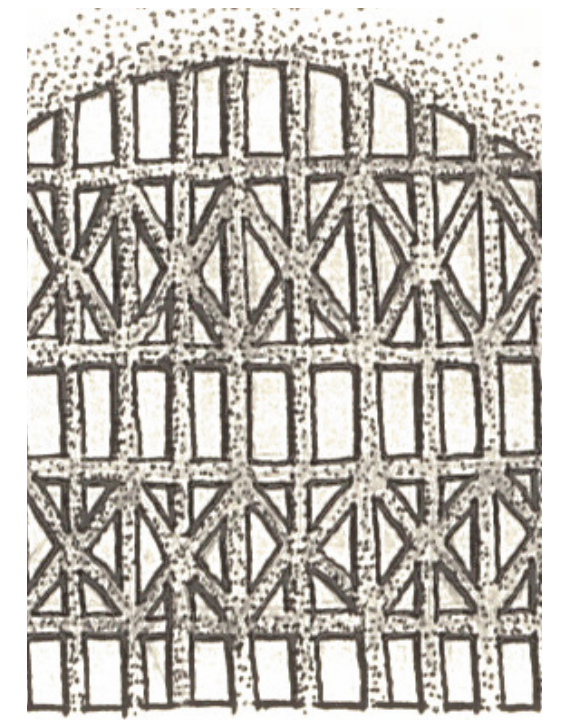
Over time, a range of house plans was developed in the Arabian Gulf. These plans varied between the different countries because although the Arabian Gulf countries shared a similar background and history, the impact and circumstances of each country differed. Countries such as Kuwait developed earlier and were more impacted by Iraq, whereas countries such as Oman and Bahrain were more influenced by Persia and the Portuguese. While the majority of the Arabian Gulf population is Sunni Muslim, the majority of the population in Bahrain is Muslim Shiat, and the majority in Oman is Ibadi.

Furthermore, some countries have embraced Wahhabism more than others. Hence, the political, sociocultural, economic, and location factors provided for variations in the building environment. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, two types of structures were used as houses. From Bahrain to the lower Gulf, people lived

in tents as temporary structures or in houses that were built around a single internal courtyard. Kuwait and Persia continued to have two parallel courtyard houses. Some houses, which belonged to the wealthy and the sheikhs, included up to four internal courtyards (Hawker, 2008).

People of the Arab Gulf were divided into different ethnic groups; the major two groups were the badu nomad people, and the hader, which were both believed to be from Arab origins. As noted in the historic context, the Arabian Peninsula was used as a route for trading in addition to pilgrimages to Mecca and the multiple migrations between the two sides of the Arabian Gulf. Although people from many ethnicities have settled in the Arabian Peninsula, Persians made up the bulk.

The Persians were mainly settlers who conveyed their culture and construction techniques to the Arabian side of the Gulf. The hader refers to the settlers who settled near the sea in towns or oases, and the badu refers to the nomadic tribes who migrated with the seasons in the Arabian Peninsula and the



Levant looking for the sources of life. Interaction between the two groups was frequent and common mainly in trading. In this part of the thesis, we will focus more on the housing methods than on the ethnicity or origins of the people (Nagy, 1997) .

The Bedouin customarily traded, hunted using falcons and other methods, and raised camels and goats for food and traveling. The badu lived in tents, mainly produced by women, which were woven from sheep and camel wool (called sadu) and were striped in black, brown, red, white, and gray. The Bedouin tribes traveled from Kuwait across northern Saudi Arabia reaching to Jordan, Syria, and northern Iraq, where the wool and





weaving processes were widespread. The woolen tent reached the lower Gulf in a later stage, and weaving of carpets and clothing took place in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, and Sharjah. The sadu weaving was used not only to make the tent walls but also to make many other useful items such as storage bags, rugs, and dressings for their camels. The tent is known as the bayt sha'r or "house of hair" and can reach more than 40 feet in length.

The tent is constructed in a simple manner and designed to be assembled and disassembled easily, which was a necessity due to the unsettled lifestyle the people led. The tent can also be easily modified to respond to weather conditions such as wind and humidity; for example, tent walls can be dropped completely to maximize the cooling effects of breezes. The material used to create the tent would eventually wear out under the harsh conditions, with the material usually lasting for five or six years (Lockerbie, 2015).

The tent features a rectangular plan that is guyed by long ropes called lakh. The profile of the tent is fairly flat and low,

and the tensile guy ropes and wooden props create an aerodynamic profile that helps reduce the impact of strong winds. The tent sadu fabric is held up with two to three wooden center poles, called 'amuwd, per tent; families of high rank used up to five poles. The tallest pole was placed in the center of the tent, and the shorter poles were placed at the back. At the top of the central, internal vertical poles, a wooden device was used to spread the load over the sadu, which was also reinforced with qatuba, or tension bands. The tent walls are of two types, the qata and the ruaq.

The qata is the central divider, which is usually highly decorated and extends into the desert in front of the tent; the ruaq is used for the external walls, which enclose the tent on three sides. The junction of roof and wall is achieved by using large wooden pins called khilaal. The junction with the ground is created by weighting down the foot of the ruaq with a row of stones or by burying it in the sand. The hemp guy ropes are connected to the props holding up the tent. The tents varied in size based on the wealth of the owner; however, they





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were proportioned with length two to three times that of their width. Women, usually the senior married women assisted by their daughters and daughters-in-law, erected the tent and, as mentioned earlier, produced the sadu. The tent is divided into two separate areas, one for men and one for women. The women’s section used up to two-thirds of the total length of the tent and contained churns and utensils. Women entertained their female guests on the women’s side; their side was also used for the family and for sleeping. The men’s section contained the weapons, harnesses, and saddles and was used as a majlis where a coffee fire was maintained. The qata is installed across the width of the tent and extends outside. Its purpose is to divide the family activities from those of the men, particularly when there are guests on the men’s side, to provide privacy. It is often highly decorated, sometimes with the tribal-specific patterns because it is seen by all visitors, and it is also used to enclose the front of the men’s or women’s section of the tent if required for privacy or due to weather conditions (Hawker, 2008).

The orientation of the tents was strictly regulated. Donald Powell Cole, an anthropologist who studied Arab nomadic cultures, has stated that the tent usually was oriented toward the south, with their backs to the prevailing wind. The women’s areas were to the west of the ruaq, and the men’s sections to the immediate east. Hence, visitors and guests approached the tents from the southeast toward the men’s section. A temporary mosque—musalla—was demarcated in the sand with rocks on the far east side. The tents of a tribe were usually distributed in a relatively regulated manner, with the tent of the head of the tribe usually assembled at the top, north end of a u-shaped layout as an indication of his position. In other conditions, the head of the tribe would take the best area for grazing and access to water. The other tents were positioned based on kinship and to provide for each family as well.

The norms indicate that visitors should always approach tents from the front, even if the distance was longer. This enables the host to see them from a distance and allows the men to be prepared to welcome the guests and

the women to move to their private section. The men receive their guests in their section, which is the majlis. Honoring guests and being hospitable is important in desert life. The majlis has cushions on the perimeter—each one called a misnad—which the men lean on with their left elbow, allowing their right hand to be free to receive the freshly prepared Arabic coffee. A grinder to grind fresh coffee is always present as well as an incense burner. A fire and dowā is continually present in front of the main tent, which is used to prepare coffee in a dalla, which is a typical brass coffee pot, and tea. Sometimes, milk is offered to the guests, which is usually provided from the camels but occasionally from goats kept by the family or tribe. Of course, preparing a full lamb with rice was essential for hospitality purposes. A host is required by custom to receive and entertain any person who comes to him for three days before he may even ask what he can do for him. The host is also required to assist the guest in moving toward his next destination ( Lockerbie, 2015)..

The tent is an ideal solution in terms of its flexibility and suitability to the

requirements of Bedouin life in the desert. During the rain, the yarns of the tent fabric swell slightly to block the water from gaining access through the weave, and the oily nature of the goat and camel hair assists in shedding water as well. Lengthy and heavy rain eventually comes through the weave, however, in the form of a fine mist, causing the occupants to adjust guy ropes to minimize standing water on top of the roof. That being said, the Bedouin always welcome rain because it means prosperity. The lightweight weave of the tent allows light to come through, and the fabric moving with the air provides the feeling of coolness.

The ruaq is usually taken down completely in the summer, using just the roof elements to provide shade; in the cold weather, the qata is closed to seal the open side of the tent with the internal fire providing warmth. There were also nomad tribes on the Persian side of the Gulf as well, they migrated from the waters of the Arabian Gulf over the mountains into the dry land, leading their herds of sheep and goats to rich grazing lands. Their tents and carpets were famous, mainly among the



Qashqai, Bakhtiari, and Khamsah areas (Hawker, 2008)..

The hader of the Arabian Gulf lived in houses , the basic common courtyard house form throughout the region consisted of four main elements: a courtyard الحوش (al hoosh in Arabic), a line of buildings planned around a central courtyard, a roof terrace السطح (al satih) accessed by a staircase located in the courtyard, and roof terraces that contained a single room in some cases. Regardless of class, many people adapted this plan, but the construction materials indicated the main differentiation of the owner’s relative wealth. There is a marked difference between houses that were constructed in coral and beach stone and houses that were constructed in palm fronds.

Depending on the location of the house within the Arabian Gulf and the economic ability of the owners, the courtyard contained a water source such as a well or a pond, a small garden with shade trees to help with cooling, and a few other trees such as the Indian almond tree (Hawker, 2008).. Like the other houses in the Arab

Muslim cities, the courtyard houses were used for both practical climactic and social reasons. Both the internal courtyards and the internal orientation of the building were important for providing family privacy. Hence, parts of the house were semi-public in nature. In Kuwait, southern Iraq, and the interior of Persia, each one of the parallel courtyards and its surrounding rooms were used separately by each gender.

In Persia, the courtyard dedicated for the family’s private use was called the andarun (or “inside house”) while the courtyard dedicated for receiving guests was called the biruni (or “outside house”). In the Arabian Gulf, houses, like the tents described earlier, had a majlis, which is a room with a door to the street. The majlis was (and often still is) separated from the private part of the house to allow the male owner of the house to receive men from the neighborhood or community without disturbing the privacy of the women (Hawker, 2008).

Houses belonging to wealthier owners were often constructed two stories high. Oman and Saudi Arabia are unique in

that they also have examples of three-story houses. Houses were oriented toward the prevailing winds. The designs of the houses included passive cooling methods, such as wind towers and wind vents built into the walls; these became characteristic of the architecture of the Gulf. The construction materials contributed to the improvement of the climate conditions within the courtyard house. Coral, mud, and gypsum plaster were practical from both economic and thermal comfort perspectives. The combination of the construction of smaller rooms thoughtfully oriented toward the prevailing winds and the porous nature of the construction materials, as well as their low thermal conductivity, relatively improved the climate within the buildings in comparison to the extreme heat and humidity outside.

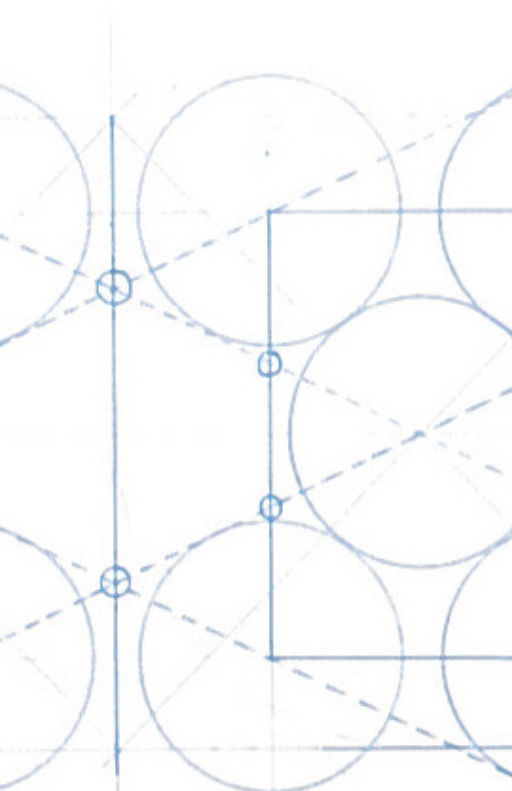
The houses located within the date gardens in the oases received an enhanced cooling effect from the surrounding winds, such as the houses in Najd, in which the leaves of the palm trees helped to filter sand dust deposits, and the irrigation canals helped to cool the wind. The upper levels of the

houses were commonly occupied during the summer months to take advantage of the greater wind movement. Many people throughout the Gulf also slept on their rooftops during the hottest time of the year. As previously indicated, some houses were only seasonally occupied (Hawker 2008).

There were two basic types of masonry architecture in the Gulf: Arab masonry and Persian masonry. The Arab masonry style was based on the use of external masonry masses with external buttresses and internal niches. It was used throughout the Gulf but was particularly prevalent in the upper Gulf, mainly in southern Iraq, Kuwait, and Bushehr on the Persian coast, which had a substantial Arab population. The typical house plan consisted of two parallel buildings surrounding a square courtyard fronted by a long, narrow transverse room. Travelers’ accounts of Basra of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveal that the Arab masonry style existed in Basra before it was replaced by the Ottoman architecture, which was characterized by cantilevered wooden balconies in the last half of the nineteenth century. One theory suggests

that this style was derived from an old form of houses that were built in ancient Mesopotamia and introduced to Kuwait by the caravan routes from northern Najd across the Iraqi desert to Zubayr and into Syria. This theory suggests that this older style was utilized in the deserts of northern Najd and western Iraq throughout the Middle Ages, and that it was introduced to the upper Gulf coast by the Bani Khalid tribe of northern Najd and southern Iraq in the 1600s (Hawker 2008).

In the last half of the nineteenth century, the Arab masonry style was then replaced by the Persian masonry style. This masonry style was based on a structural frame with piers and beams supporting non-loadbearing infill panels. The solid piers and beams were constructed of compacted coral and stone supporting wooden roof poles, which acted as an architectural frame. The Arab Gulf version of this style is linked to the Safavid and Zand era buildings of the Persian province of Fars from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While there are not many resources available that discuss the development of this style, it appears



to have become popular along the old interior caravan route adjoining the central Persian deserts (Hawker 2008). The most prominent feature of this style is the wind tower, a tower with openings that channeled the cooler and stronger winds into the interior spaces. The most common style of wind tower in the Gulf was the multidirectional tower with four cavities facing in four directions to catch the prevailing winds as they shifted throughout the changes of tides, times of day, and seasons.

The unidirectional wind towers, which only face the direction of the prevailing winds during the hottest time of the year, were used in countries with cold winters, such as the old region Mughal capital of Thatta in Pakistan, in the interior of Persia and Afghanistan (Hawker 2008).

The royal architecture of the inner Persia inspired the design of the houses of the Arab Gulf; the tribal leaders who had traveled through the trade roads to the coast emulated the shah's palaces. The Persian style peaked in the Arab Gulf during the first two decades of the twentieth century and was evident

in most of the Arab coastal towns; however, this style was less prevalent in the upper Gulf of Qatif, Dammam, Kuwait, and Bulshehr. According to John Yarwood, a researcher and a writer of several books about the architecture of the Arabian Peninsulas, this style was not used due to the large amounts of windborne dust in these towns; he also refers to tribal affiliations as another reason (Hawker 2008).

Oman and Saudi Arabia had varying methods of masonry construction. Oman houses were commonly built around a smaller internal courtyard; the patterns of human settlement were also denser than in the upper Gulf. Large villages were formed on the mountainous steppes and were contained by thick protective wall in the oases. The upper class houses were rectangular with four interconnected blocks that cast deep shadows on the interiors. Houses of lesser status had front courtyards with a two-level structure located at the back.

The ground floor included an arcaded terrace that supported the first floor terrace adjacent to the residential

rooms, which were open to the prevailing winds. The ceilings of the interior were usually decorated with colorful painted or woven geometric patterns. Another common characteristic was the long, pointed, and cusped arches. The wooden elements usually had elaborate incised carved bands. The use of these elements led to the development of specialized wood carving workshops in some ports, such as Sur, which imported Indian timber and contributed to the Dhow shipyards (Hawker 2008).

Eastern Saudi houses were diverse in their use of construction materials as well as their scale, plans, and decorations, due to the vast geographic area of Saudi Arabia, the diversity in environmental conditions within different locations, and the diversity of the tribes. The houses of Najd and central Saudi Arabia were usually compacted in fortified oasis towns, which consisted of small courtyard houses made of tall, thick mud brick walls that cast deep shadows. The tops of the walls were characterized by stepped merlons, and decorative patterns of cutout geometric shapes

saw widespread use, as they provided internal airflow. Similar to their use in Oman, the use of wooden carving elements in the houses facilitated the development of wood working workshops throughout central Saudi Arabia; these workshops specialized in in the production of thick wooden doors with intricate calligraphy and sometimes colorful geometric patterns (Hawker 2008). 'Areesh—palm fronds houses—were found across the Arabian Gulf.

This style of house was designed to be economical and physically transportable, as the family moved in response to the seasonal changes of the economy. There were a number of design variations with regard to the layout and roofing of the houses. Houses in the inner desert and in the mountain were more modest than the ones in the larger coastal towns.

These types of houses were widespread in areas such as the Liwa oasis of Abu Dhabi, which was positioned in the sand dunes; the summer houses were built atop the dunes to maximize cooling wind flow through the more loosely whickered walls, and the winter houses were made of more densely woven

palm fronds and were located in the dune's hollow, using the dune's slope as a protection from the cold winter winds. These houses were referred to in the lower Gulf as khaimah, the Arabic word for "tent." Historic photographs of the coast of Baluchistan around Gwadar show that this type of house was common among the Baluch tribes; similar forms are still used as outbuildings on farms throughout Southern Iran (Hawker 2008).

Variations of basic stone houses or huts types were utilized throughout the Gulf, such as the small stone huts of the Shihuh tribes of the northern Trucial coast and the Musandam Peninsula of Oman; these were primarily intended for temporary occupation, and were located on resource sites inherited through tribal position and relationships based on the economic function of a given community. Movement was based on seasonal changes.

Some cities specialized in cottage industries, such as A'ali in Bahrain, which specialized in the production of juss. Generally, the scale, materials, and styles of the coastal houses were

better developed in comparison with the modest structures of the mountains or oases, demonstrating the wealth of the port cities and the importance of the maritime trade (Hawker 2008).



## 4.3.4

### The Majlis

Most of the houses in the Arabian and Persian side of the Gulf had a dedicated male guest room that shared a similar approach to achieve privacy requirements. Most of the preserved houses belonged to sheikhs or wealthy merchants; however, these examples can provide an indication of the majlis requirements. The first example is the waterfront house of Salem bin Mohammed Al- Ganim (Figure 27), a wealthy merchant, and comes from the upper Gulf, specifically Kuwait, located in the Sharq area (East) which was built in the 1919 and is now used as a foundry and artistic workshop by the Antiquities and Museums Department. The family used the house until 1951.

The House has three entrances: the main diwaniyah—or the name of the majlis in Kuwait—entrance overlooks the Gulf coast, the second leads to the private family area, and the third leads to the kitchen. All the external walls of the house are designed without windows or other openings, with the exception of the front walls of the men’s diwaniyah. The facade of the diwaniyah has five windows with low thresholds and high arches. A bench (dacha) is located

outside to the left of the entrance. The main entrance door leads to a short corridor or vestibule opening onto the liwan (covered terrace) and the hoosh (courtyard) of the diwaniyah. The courtyard approximate dimensions are 10.20 m × 9.00 m; the ceiling of the vestibule is covered with wooden beams (jandal). In the middle of the corridor to the left stands the entrance to the men’s diwaniyah, which overlooks the interior of the liwan. The diwaniyah’s five doors made of wood with colored glass, semi-circular on the top, overlook the liwan as well. The liwan overlooks the diwaniyah courtyard and is one step higher than the courtyard.

The liwan is connected with an internal door to a room equipped for Arabic coffee preparation, and also connected to another room which was used for the people responsible for overseeing the diwaniyah and serving the guests. Another liwan connects to the diwaniyah on the south-east overlooking the courtyard, with two linked rooms: one used to store food and the other serving as a bedroom with a bathroom to host male visitors travelling from other towns or countries.



Figure 27: Salem bin Mohammed Al- Ganim house, Kuwait

The courtyard of the diwaniyah is similar in design and location to the broader design known as the Arab courtyard in general and the square-shaped courtyard of the Kuwaiti house in particular. In the middle of the courtyard stands a well created to collect rain water and covered whenever not in use. In the corner of the southeast of the courtyard runs a narrow corridor (mdrban) that leads to the private courtyard of the family to the northeast and to the kitchen courtyard from the southeast.

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The third example is from a Persian city within the upper Gulf, which is Busher.



Figure 28: House in Sohar, Oman

The plan in figure 31 shows a distinctively elongated house with two courtyards. One courtyard is almost dedicated to the men’s area in which the majlis is located. The door opens to the majlis courtyard and leads first to a loggia and then the men’s majlis in a layout similar to the house of Kuwait.



Figure 29: House in Dhofar, Oman





non-political activities are carried out. Traditionally, personal meetings in majlises were the means to pass on news, develop ideas and form opinions, effect organization, and where communication was made face to face—a necessity before the introduction of electronic communication methods and also a reflection of the importance of physical communication.

A similar system operates for women as well, but in the past it was confined to the house only. Within the physical space of the majlis, any issue of interest can be discussed freely, whether it relates to family, politics, business or, entertainment, etc.

While majlis are set aside in most of the houses for men to meet and connect with younger generations, the same activities can be carried out nowadays in a café, shopping mall, or sports club. Furthermore, anyone can join and leave at will, sharing information and opinions. The majlis has maintained its importance in the social, political, and economic life in the State of Qatar. Contemporary majlises are equipped with televisions, radios, telephones, and some even with

PlayStations and computers. Some of the majlises were also created for specific goals, such as for sports, economics, and politics, with specific timings and meeting schedules.

Today, while the majlis still holds a similar physical location within most of the houses of the Arab Gulf, a majlis may be detached from the house with its own entrance or attached to the house while maintaining a separate entrance. The difference, however, is that the courtyard house model is rarely used, and hence maintaining a certain level of privacy becomes challenging. While Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman societies are less restricted with regards to gender segregation, the men’s majlis in its original role as a social space maintained this segregation. However, the majlis plays a variant role within the society.

In Kuwait, its role is more political or intellectual, and accordingly women may be accepted in this context. Technology and the creation of groups on social media programs has become normatized in most of Arab Gulf countries; moreover, the availability of comfortable public meeting spaces such as coffee shops,

cinemas, malls, and parks also impacted the connection between different generations.

# 4.4

Qatar



A contemporary map of Doha, Qatar, (Figure 37) shows the city’s diverse districts. As the capital of Qatar, Doha aspires to be a global city that has not turned its back on its heritage. The decision makers, developers, and end users associated with Qatar’s major architectural achievements have different interpretations of the reshaping of Doha. Over the last two decades, Doha, among other cities in the Arabian Gulf, has witnessed accelerated development, urbanization, and globalization. The construction process in Qatar has involved several projects: Lusail, the future city of Doha; the Pearl, the “Arab Riviera”; Msheireb, the heart of Doha; Katara, the cultural village; Sport City; and Education City. Each district aspires to adopt different principles of modernity, resulting in the construction of multiple identities and multiple interpretations of modern cities within the city of Doha.

A common factor among these developments is that they have attracted the contributions of renowned international architects. Although these new projects have been well received internationally, the relationship

between modern architectural/interior environments and the past/future remains nebulous. Permanent settlement in Qatar began during the eighteenth century, when tribes such as the Al Thani clan moved from central Arabia to the north coast of Qatar, where they inhabited the area around Zubara. They then resettled on the eastern coast of the Qatar Peninsula in 1847, where they founded the settlement of Al Bidaa at the location of an old fishing village. At the end of the nineteenth century, Ottoman troops built a fort in Al Bidaa, which led to the development of the largest settlement on the eastern coast at that time. After the departure of the Turkish army, the British Resident in the Arabian Gulf signed a protection treaty in 1916, under which Qatar became an official British protectorate (Adham 2008; Scholz 1999).

During the first decades of the twentieth century, Al Bidaa and its settlements grew to approximately 12,000 residents due to the thriving pearl trade. However, Qatar’s total population decreased during the 1930s from 27,000 to fewer than 16,000 residents when the pearl diving industry collapsed. Al Bidaa was

later renamed Doha, which refers to a big tree on the coast or to the round shape of the coastline (Al Buainain 1999). Doha’s indigenous architecture remained unchanged until the mid-twentieth century, when modern growth began. The indigenous architecture was the result of direct human interaction and participation in the building process. The built environment, which was molded by the climate and culture, was based on the functional requirements of the spaces, the surrounding natural environment, and sociocultural factors related to tribal affiliations, religion, family size, and structure.

These aspects were apparent in the structural features of the local architecture, which were adapted to the desert climate, and decorative elements such as plant ornaments and geometric patterns on walls and doors that were symbolic of the people’s tribal origins and the surrounding nature. The inherited knowledge and traditions were the basis of the creation of these settlements, as there was no planning or regulation. Settlement patterns developed based on the multiplying of the courtyard house model to form



neighborhoods that were connected to public areas such as the market, port, and mosque. Settlements were the results of residents’ collective efforts and conventions (Jaidah and Bourenane 2009). Oil was discovered in the west of the country in 1937 by Petroleum DevelopmentQatar Ltd., although oil production did not begin until the end of World War II (Scholz 1999). The initial oil profits were devoted to the development of infrastructure. Urban and architectural development flourished in Doha, the residence of the ruling family. From the 1950s to 1970, Doha’s population rose from around 14,000 residents to over 83,000, of which foreign immigrants accounted for around 67%. Nearly 90% of the working population was non-Qatari in 1970 because of the absence of an educated workforce among the local residents. In 1970, a survey indicated that the Qatari workforce was limited to 25% of approximately 30,000, of whom the majority were working in the recently established public administration in Doha (Al Buainain 1999).

In the 1950s and 1960s, settlement patterns were influenced by the development of infrastructure such as

roads and the provision of electricity and water. The newly-established administration had a limited impact on the overall development planning and regulations, even following the first public housing law in 1964 (Al Buainain 1999). However, newly imported products such as cars and air conditioning had a key impact on urban and architectural design; roads were broadened to create proper access for cars, and courtyard buildings were superseded by new buildings made of cement blocks (Scholz 1999).

The transformation of Qatar from a country of local settlements to a growing country of oil and gas was precipitous. Importing the required expertise and workforce brought about development. The architectural design of the period reflects this conversion to modernity, which was evident in the sudden shift from indigenous design principles to the new principles regulated by the government. The built environment during the pre-oil era was the result of the direct interaction between local inhabitants and their surroundings, but modern infrastructure and planning methods created a new type of city.

The traditional local neighborhoods comprised of courtyard houses and modern residential houses that utilized lands of a similar size replaced narrow streets. Western consultants recommended a planning method based on their Western perception of modern spaces. The urban and architectural planning authorities in Doha currently face the challenge of implementing similar accelerated development strategies while creating a unique identity for the city based on a holistic approach that incorporates social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors. This is part of the Qatar National Vision, which was first introduced in 2009 and fully realized in the Qatar National Development Strategy of 2011.

# 4.4.1

Qatar, Society, and Culture



Qatar is an important center of trade and commerce within the Arabian Gulf region. The Peninsula of Qatar witnessed various cultures and civilizations beginning in the Neolithic period.

Throughout history, Qatar has played a vital role as a trade connection route for commodities including copper, iron, tin, several types of wood, Surat blue, ceramics, clothing, cotton and coarse fabrics, woolen shawls, dates, spices, coffee, sugar, oil, rice, gold and silver, etc. Qatar’s trade contributions have ranged from dried fish and pottery to purple dye, horses, and precious pearls. Although the peninsular landmass that makes up Qatar has sustained humans

for thousands of years, for the bulk of its history, the arid climate fostered only short-term settlements by nomadic tribes. During the Islamic rule of the Umayyad and the Abbasid in Damascus and Baghdad, with the expansion of the mercantile activities on the Coast of Qatar, settlements began to grow on the north of Qatar, with more than 100 small stone-built houses (Qatar News Agency 2010). The people of Qatar traditionally imported items such as pottery, palm leaves, and metal items from India, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

The import trade expanded after the discovery of oil, and Qatar began to import items like ceramics and metal

from China. Today Qatar imports materials from all over the world. Qatar’s heritage is a byproduct of its historical contact with people from Indian and Persian civilizations as well as its acquisition of the Arab culture. The Qatari culture (music, art, dress, and cuisine) is extremely similar to that of other Arabian Gulf countries.

Qatari society was traditionally divided into two segments: the Bedouin (nomadic tribes), mostly Arabs from Saudi Arabia who lived in the desert, and the Hadar (settlers), mostly marine dwellers who lived by the sea and worked as fishermen, pearl divers, and boat-builders. Carved ocean-going wooden

vessels (dhows) can still be seen around the coast and in Doha’s fishing harbors. Due to a lack of natural materials and labor, Qatar has not traditionally produced many handicrafts. Most of Qatar’s handymen or craftsmen were migrants from the Persian side of the Arabian Gulf. Handicrafts were limited to the traditional intricate weaving by Bedouin women. Qatari non-material culture is endowed with aesthetics such as literature, folklore, oral traditions and popular beliefs, crafts and traditional songs and dances. Equally important, Qatar’s traditional food has a special place within the societies of the two dominant communities (Barrault 2004). The Arabian culture was and still is considered an oral culture, and Qatar is no exception. Prior to Islam, tribes took pride in their poetry; the tribal poet held a very special position. During the first days of Islam, the Qur’an was considered a miracle of Arabic language, full of rhythmic verses and hidden meanings. Traditionally, songs, stories, and poetry were the central forms of entertainment in this part of the world. The dhow owners made sure to hire a singer (nham) to fill the pearl divers’ long nights and restless days with songs

about life, family, and the longing for the far away home. The Bedouin spent their hectic days and endless nights reciting the poetry of the grandfathers and creating new poems competing with sounds of the wailing winds. The grandmothers held their children at night and whispered stories about the lands beyond the sea. Children played nearby in their houses, raising their voices with songs about childhood. News, history, culture and heritage were carried in the memories of Qatari people and narrated to the next generation. This strong legacy of oral culture still dominates Qatari life (Gareeb, interview).



## 4.4.2

Home, Social, and Cultural Factors

A house form, according to Rapoport, is the consequence of a range of socio-cultural factors seen in their broadest terms. The house is a reflection of culture and civilization, as the family is a micro-level society, with the basic element consisting of the individuals being born and raised in the institutions of the family. Hence, the house is a manifestation of the family structure, religious beliefs, and individual needs and desires and reflects the family’s economic, cultural, and social backgrounds and aspirations. This identity is proclaimed in all facets of daily life: the job, the diet, the purchases, and the residence.

Home making is a process of place making, and place identity is both a physical and environmental phenomenon, denoting self-identity. The home thus manifests personal, social, and self-identification activities.

Demchak (2000) emphasizes that identity is merged into the houses and community to which we belong. Therefore, house designs, which result in the type of houses that are built, determine the society that is created;

hence, including house design as a factor in the creation of a city’s identity is essential. The building facades form the first impression and glimpse of the city’s identity. Interior environments also have a major impact on actual daily activities and quality of life. On average, people spend most of their time indoors. While the environment design represents the occupants’ style of life, the environment itself influences the occupants’ behavior. Therefore, it is essential to study and understand the interior environment, as these are as, if not more, responsible for the shaping and expressing of social/ cultural identities as are architectural exterior elevations.

According to Oren (1996), socio-cultural characteristics and the lifestyle of the residents have a great influence on the design of the house. House design is centered on and around the house owner, and the two cannot be viewed separately. The intimate associations between built environments and the sociocultural principles of those who inhabit them are evident in spatial manifestations, material adaptations, transformations, and symbolic gestures. Many factors impact the decision-

making process in the design of a house, including sociological, psychological, and physiological factors, which are interrelated and all influenced by the interior environment. The relationship between individuals and their environment and the way they perceive space and react to it is affected by sociological desires, psychological states, and individual differences.

The study of these factors and their changes are essential in creating a good house design. Furthermore, if people’s behavior and cultural backgrounds and attitudes are not understood, studied, and investigated, the result would have a tremendous negative impact on the inhabitants and the environment. Physical environments and human artifacts are designed in the sense that they embody human decisions and choices and specific ways of doing things. Occupants’ perceptions of their environment affect their social interaction within it.

Social interaction can be investigated based on certain concepts such as territoriality, crowding, and privacy, both visual and auditory. Privacy also



relates to the four personal interaction levels as per Edward T. Hall’s concept of ‘proxemics’: Intimate space, personal space, social space, and public space.

Responses to the built environment are multifaceted and can be assumed in terms of three psychological stages of human behavior: perception of the environment, cognition, and spatial behavior. Another important issue to address is aesthetic appreciation, which is both expressed in and influenced by the environment. The concept of beauty changes with time and place, purpose and context. Individual differences such, as sex, age, health, background, and relation to objects, to name a few, are important factors of behavioral responses to an environment.

Sociological determinants relate to the social needs and problems of the occupants. Factors that affect these sociological responses are gender, ethnicity and class, which impact the group dynamics and method of communication. Group dynamics are a result of the personality and cultural background of the people, their mission, and the physical setting.

In a house design, this could include family structure and size, religion, and income, among others. The expression and degree of influence of the previous factors vary according to the society being analyzed.

A good housing design is therefore one that identifies and understands these social cultural factors and ensures that they are not just reflected in the design, but that the design concepts and scheme are based on them.

## 4.4.3

### Qatari Family

In Qatar, “family” refers to a group larger than the domestic unit. Descent is tracked through the male line, and so one is a member of his or her father’s lineage and maintains close ties to that lineage. After marriage, women remain members of the father’s lineage but are partially integrated into the lineages of their husbands and children. Extended families were the majority in the past, but extended, joint, and nuclear households are all common today. The preference is to live with, or at least near, the husband’s family.

This patrilineal proximity is accomplished by means of a single extended household, walled family compounds with separate houses, or simply living in the same neighborhood (Gareeb, interview).

As for the Bedouin, the same concepts applied with a few differences. The family house was usually a tent similar to the previously described tents of the Gulf. In a corner of the yard, they built the house’s kitchen, surrounded by iron plates on the inside. In another corner of the yard, they set up a small tent to store supplies and belongings. A nearby

corral housed cattle and camels. The Bedouin customarily raised and traded camels and goats, using them for food and transportation.

## 4.4.4

### Traditional Qatari House

As with any architecture in other Islamic cities, the traditional architecture in the Arabian Gulf responded to the social, economic, environmental and climatic factors of the area; hence, the architecture might be viewed as a less sophisticated form of Islamic architecture characterized by the use of simpler construction materials and prominence of trabeated construction forms. Its vocabulary of building elements responded directly to the need for environmental controls, security and shelter (Lockerbie 2015).

It is important to note that there is no pure form of traditional Qatari architecture, as there is no pure form of architecture of any society. The forms, plans, and designs were based on the exchange of knowledge with other cities on both sides of the Arabian Gulf. However, there are main values that occurred in most of the average residential buildings in Islamic cities. These values may have been implemented differently in various eras and cities of Islam but were definitely factors in designing residential buildings; accordingly, one must obtain certain characteristics of buildings when

arriving at a description or definition of Islamic architecture. By extension, much of this will relate to the traditional architecture of Qatar. During the pearl diving era, the design and construction of the middle class Qatari Hader family house was based on specific factors such as climate, security requirements, availability of materials, and the social and religious aspects of family life.

The materials generally used in Qatar included desert stones, limestone mortar, lime-wash, cultivatable soil, sand/mud, and date palm fronds. All other materials, e.g. wrought iron and timber, were imported from adjacent countries or countries with which Qatar had a trading relationship (Abdullah, interview). Early settlers' houses were originally comprised of a single internal space (Figure 38) with a single opening that served as the entrance as well as a source of light and ventilation.

The majority of the family's activities took place in the area located directly outside the house. The house's orientation was one of the main characteristics of its design, as the back of the house was directed toward the

prevailing wind. Eventually, the single rooms were separated into two or more spaces. This provided more privacy while maintaining the required air circulation. Over time, simple houses became more complex internally and externally, eventually evolving into the spaces now referred to as Qatari courtyards (Figure 39). Growing dwellings required the development of more rooms, mainly along the inside of the north and west walls. The introduction of surrounding boundary walls provided privacy. Qatari families favored the open spaces within the house; enclosed rooms were only occupied when needed. Rooms within a house were multifunctional, with no particular designations apart from the washroom and the majlis. The only restriction is privacy between male and female members of the family. Most houses included a well and a sidra tree in the open space within the house (Abdullah, interview).

Shade was created in the front of the rooms by covering the mangrove poles that commonly extended from the front of the building. Over time, shade was achieved by constructing a colonnade of columns. This wide space, which

was raised to avoid floods, created a family sitting area, or liwan. Houses also included an open-air raised space called a baraha located immediately outside the south wall. This space functioned as an open-air majlis. A closed men's majlis was developed inside the house. However, some houses included both a closed majlis and a baraha (Figure 40). Both the baraha and the majlis were usually furnished with rugs on the floor and misnad (cushions) for the host and his guests to lean on.

The two illustrations show a fully developed courtyard house. The courtyard house design included decorative gypsum boards (if the owner could afford them) for aesthetic and functional reasons. These panels were used to highlight important areas and to cover windows, which increased shade and privacy. The main doors were sometimes curved.

Electricity was not introduced to buildings until the mid-fifties. Until then, traditional kerosene lamps illuminated rooms. Storage spaces included niches in the walls, extended wooden beams in the walls upon

which items were hung, and decorated wooden chests. Since families had few belongings, there was little need for storage space (Lockerbie 2015).

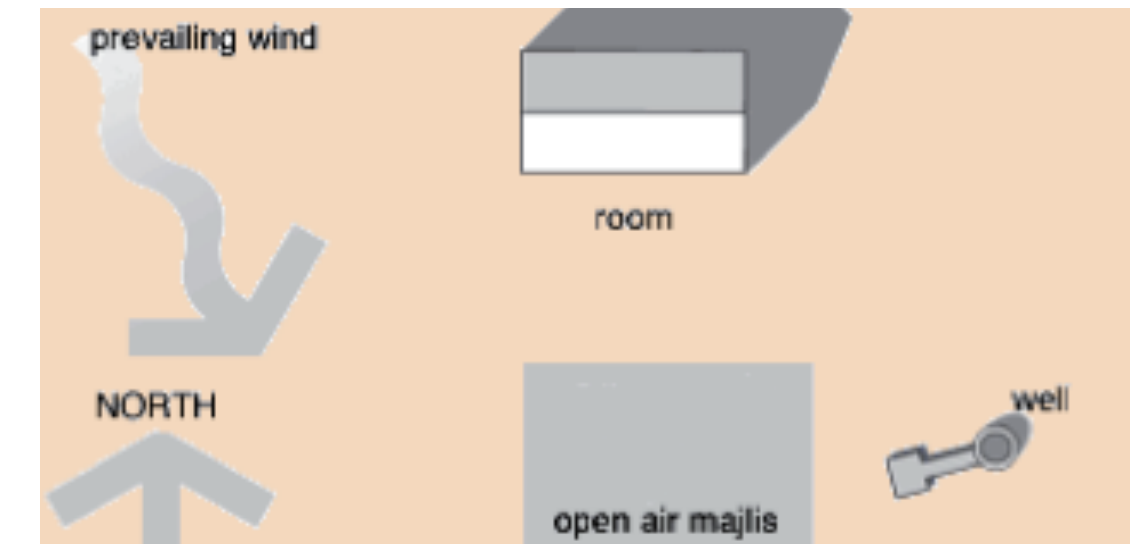


Figure 38: Early settlers house

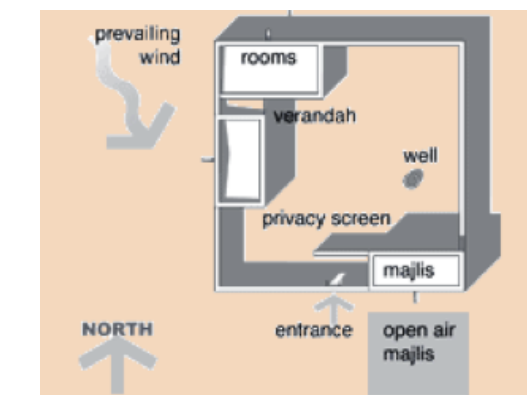


Figure 39: Traditional Qatari house

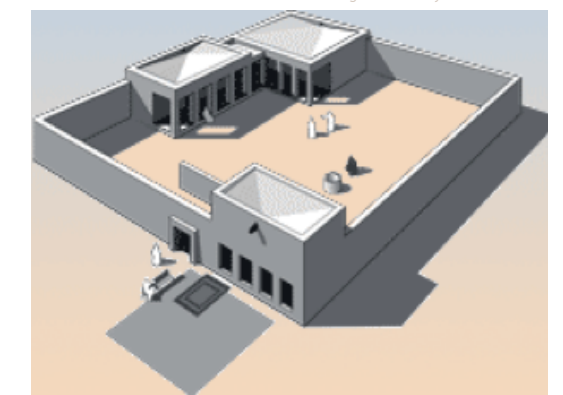


Figure 40: Majlis location in the house



4.4.4.1  
Traditional Qatari majlis

As the majlis denotes a public space within the house where guests are received and entertained, the men’s majlis is the space that represents the head of the household. It is his introduction to the world, a place where he can demonstrate his character and be judged by his peers. As such, it is important to him that it is organized and designed in a manner that accurately represents him.

The male majlis was placed near the main entrance of the house and equipped with a privacy screen that made it impossible to see the other occupants of the house. The main door of the house was so short that visitors had to bend down to enter. This simple feature provided additional privacy because visitors could not look directly into the house. Some houses also provided a bench located outside the house, known as a dacha, where guests could be entertained. The dacha satisfied people’s desire to sit, observe the neighborhood, and have informal meetings with friends. Sometimes the majlis was designed as a separate structure standing apart from the house wall. This depended on the social status and availability of land and economic

resources. The structure of the majlis was based on a solid floor, trabeated construction with the structure expressed vertically and horizontally. The window openings are at a low level, and danjal, or timber beams, spanning up to about 3.50 meters. The majlis fittings included timber paneled ceiling and decorative carved plasterwork walls. The inward-opening windows were paneled with timber shutters and planked ledges and fixed with iron nails. Double teak doors swung on pin hinges with a decorated vertical post, central post, and external timber lock or lockable iron bolt. Usually, one or more of the spaces between columns would be set aside for storage of coffee equipment and incense burners; this space was called a wjar. Kerosene lamps provided lighting (Abdullah, interview).

The room had cushions placed around the walls where visitors could sit. The floor was covered with woven rugs or tufted carpets, and seating on the floor was comprised of dowshek (cotton-filled mattress) and misnad (cushions to lean on). Most majlis had a place set aside for the preparation of coffee. This small area included an elevated brass or steel

stove and a roasting spoon on which the coffee beans would be prepared before being placed in a wooden cooling box. After returning to room temperature, they would be placed in a pestle and mortar to be crushed. They would then be put, with water, into a cooking della that would be used to pour the coffee into a number of small cups, and, after use, placed in a bowl of warm water for rinsing. Majlis were characterized by specific seating arrangements. The center of the room located opposite to the door was reserved for the owner of the house, the family elders, or an important guest. When a visitor entered the majlis, he greeted the people inside from right to left. Arabic coffee, or qahwa, was usually prepared in the majlis and served by the host or the youngest person directly related to the host. Red tea could be served as well.

The qahwa was served from a della held in the left hand, the right hand holding a set of small finajil into which was poured a small amount of hot Arabic coffee. The finajil was taken with the right hand and sipped while the host waited. It was customary to accept three cups of qahwa before giving the finajil back, shaking

the hand to indicate that another cup was not needed. If you did not shake your hand, the cup would be re-filled and returned to you. It was impolite to refuse it. The host would then move on to another guest or, more commonly, he would serve multiple guests at the same time. For formal visits, a midkhan (incense burner) with perfumed wood was brought into the room and passed among the guests, who would allow the smoke to waft toward them. The midkhan itself was usually made of tin on the inside and different metals on the outside, commonly decorated with brass studs and mirror work (Lockerbie 2015).

The owner of the majlis was aware that its design should not be ostentatious. While majlis designs varied based on the owner’s social ranking, the majlis of higher-ranking individuals were not more ornamented; rather, they were more formal in both their furnishings and their traditions the higher up the social scale they represented. (Lockerbie 2015). Because the inhabitants themselves built the earlier settlements, it was possible to identify a locality based on the house designs. However, this cannot be seen in the contemporary residential

architecture of Qatar, and the space that Qataris live in no longer reflects these norms, as the concept and provision of housing design has changed. Openness to other cultures, changes in population demography, the information revolution, and modern life requirements are major forces of sociocultural change, while megaprojects, development plans, enhanced transportation, and modern construction materials and technologies have brought about changes in the building process. The study of architecture within Muslim cities, including examples from Cairo, Aleppo, and Fez in addition to the focus on the traditional architecture within the Arabian Peninsula, revealed generic design principles that are positive and suitable to be implemented in all times and were adopted regardless of the region; hence, these can be referred to as virtues of architecture achievable both physically and phycology. Among these virtues, three main ones are:

-Privacy: a strict hierarchical attitude to privacy through the urban design of the towns, the space planning of the house, and the design of doors and windows of the house.

- Simplicity: one of the Islamic concepts that encourage Muslims to respect others and not to appear pretentious. The concept applies on courtyard houses designs through the promotion of interior over exterior development. The articulation of internal spaces reflects the construction techniques and incorporates non-representational abstract elements of ornamentation. This created an intriguing mystery and sense of discovery. Islamic architecture in general is described as ‘architecture of the veil’, as the beauty is found in the internal spaces, which are not visible from the outside.

- Contextuality: the traditional house was developed in response to environmental, climatic, religious, and cultural factors. Every element in the traditional house embodied an answer to a different problem that emerged according to a specific condition.

# 4.5

## Majlis Metamorphosis

In the midst of the vast, nonstop construction process that is part of the creation of Doha, a city in the making, an observer of the architecture and interior public buildings and of individual residential buildings will notice a large gap between the understanding and interpretation of architecture and interior design in the two types of buildings. This precipitous architectural and interior environmental shift is driven by the emergence of new urban development strategies (master plans), the urban traffic network, systems of construction, building materials, furniture, fixtures, and equipment. In fact, there is a conflict between the aesthetics of the two. While some of the new public developments endeavor to provide a contemporary interpretation of local architectural values, the majority of new developments imitate historical buildings in places in Europe, such as Versaille. This style preference reflects the current symbol of sophistication and method to communicate social and financial status, as demonstrated in Figure 41. The pictures are taken from the account of a young Qatari man with a majority of Qatari followers, shared on Instagram, and it shows as well the

number of people who liked the images. The current design solutions and aesthetics perception within the majority of contemporary Qatari houses have lost their authenticity and instead imitate other cultures. As explained in the history of urban development in Qatar, the transition between local traditional houses and contemporary houses was not gradual but abrupt. The dialogue between the past, present, and future was interrupted and the connection not properly restored. The traditional house was developed in response to environment, climate, religious, and cultural factors; every element in the traditional house embodied an answer to a different problem that emerged according to a specific condition. The beauty of the traditional houses represents an art form drawn from the understanding of a distinctive religious and cultural lifestyle. This lifestyle was not reflected only functionally, but also in the aesthetic expression of simplicity, the humility of the facades, and the delicate detailing of the interiors, which evidenced an understanding of Islamic teaching and created an intriguing mystery and sense of discovery. Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula



Figure 41. Picture of a room within a Qatari House

and has reached at its highest to the borders from China to Spain. Most architecture in Islamic cities adopted the local architecture of the place under the authority of Islam and appropriated it to reflect the local social needs and the Islamic teachings with regards to gender separation and privacy requirements. Hence, the aesthetic design of buildings varied from one city and era to another. Understanding the context of each Islamic city is essential in understanding its architecture and art. The buildings at the beginning of Islam were simple and focused on the function rather than

the creation of elaborate designs. At a later stage of Islam, the attention was focused on leaving a legacy for each ruler or dynasty, which was not the main intent of the four Caliphs who ruled after the Prophet. Traditional Arabian Gulf architecture is a less sophisticated form of Islamic architecture due to the economic situation of that era, and characterized by the use of more prosaic construction materials and by trabeated building forms. Its construction methods responded to the need for environmental situations, climate, and shelter (Lockerbie 2015).

The principles of how traditional houses were built and filled with architectural intricacies could be used as an inspiration and guideline for our contemporary and future designs. It is possible to adapt to rapid change while continuing to value traditional architectural forms. Conversely, issues of architectural forms, distinguished spaces and their interrelation, past construction methods, and forms of utilization can be factored in without ignoring technology, new communication forms, and social and cultural developments

of our time. Traditional architecture provides a desired connection to the environmental and sociocultural context. This architecture manifests identity, and it is necessary to acknowledge its potential before it vanishes. Stuart Hall, the British cultural theorist, describes the flux of cultural identity in Cultural Identity and Diaspora (1990) as follows:

*Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)*



## 4.5.1

Precedents / Antecedents

Suha Ozkan and Robert Powell state in “Rethinking the Environmental Filter” that the concept of reconciling the past with the present and the future through the built environment has been approached from different points of view under the umbrella of architectural regionalism (Powell, 1989, 9-15). Many of the projects in Qatar may fall under revivalism or regeneration, particularly the buildings dedicated for different municipalities, such as Souq Waqif and Katara. The only difference is that these projects attempt to revive traditional architecture by copying visual elements in isolation of their original function.

Some even revive an imaginary architectural history, such as Souq Waqif (...); as for Katara, its intended purpose was to create a ‘cultural village’ in which Qatari culture meets and identifies with other cultures. Despite its good intentions in attempting to create a fireej street experience, the project became pastiche and eclectic because of the figurative physical representation. However, this thesis delves into the creation of a responsive, critical regionalism that is focused on sociocultural requirements. It aims to

promote architecture that is not only rooted in modern tradition principles but also tied to geographical and cultural context. The following projects are exploring similar ideas with regard to the domestic architecture of Qatar and the modern majlis.

## 4.5.2

Msheireb Downtown  
Doha Msheireb Properties

Msheireb is a development project that aims to revive the old commercial heart of Doha. It plans to recreate a way of living that is based on Qatari culture through the reinterpretation of traditional architecture to attract residents back to the city center. As a result, a sense of community can be restored, and the trend of decentralization reversed. The Msheireb project aims to establish new standards in the region by forming a locally distinctive and technically suitable architectural language for city center regeneration (Master Development Standards 2010).

A three-year research process was commissioned with architects, master planners, engineers, and designers from around the world to understand how the best of the past could be combined with modern, innovative technologies and thinking to create a new, distinctly Qatari architectural language. This new language will be modern yet inspired by traditional Qatari heritage and architecture in terms of proportion, simplicity, space, light, layering, ornaments, and response to climate. Utilizing the latest in sustainable

technologies, Msheireb moreover aims to adhere to the highest standards in green building. The Msheireb project is divided into the following five districts representing the purpose and practical design of urban spaces: the Diwan Amiri Quarter, Mixed-use and Residential Quarter, Heritage Quarter, Retail Quarter, and the Business Gateway.

Msheireb’s three years of research resulted in guidelines and standards forming a “manual” for design and development of master plan framework that underpins the Masterplan Planning Application (Master Development Standards, 2010).

The project has taken into consideration many of the same aspects explored in this thesis in relation to utilizing the virtues of traditional architecture in a contemporary context, such as consideration of privacy and simplicity in design, but on the scale of urban planning by reviving the fireej concept. The residential areas are divided into townhouses and apartments, and involves three types of majlis: namely, majlis within a townhouse, communal majlis for townhouses, and communal

majlis for apartments. A typical townhouse cluster of fireej comprise up to six townhouses. Every house has a private courtyard, and the clusters surround communal gardens and a communal majlis, or in some cases, a ‘magahad’ or ladies’ majlis.

Msheireb design guidelines and commercial brochures have focused on emphasizing the privacy feature of residential areas, because this is a concern of Qatari families living within a compound. The developers assumed that some of the clusters will be occupied by members of an extended family. A communal majlis is also provided for apartment buildings.

Every townhouse (referred to as a Qatari home) is planned to have a private formal majlis in addition to a second family sitting room. Every home offers a dual entrance design—one dedicated to the formal majlis, predominantly for the use of male guests, and the family entrance to be located on the other side (Figure 42).

The guidelines provided by Msheireb in the design manual with regard to

the communal majlis (Figure 43) are as follows:

- A separate communal majlis is to be planned for every four or more houses.
- A minimum of 50 m2 shall be allocated for the main majlis room. Within this area, a toilet and kitchen are also to be specified.
- The communal majlis should:
  - Overlook the street
  - Have two doors—an entrance onto the street and a back door leading to the communal courtyard
  - Have a direct connection to the basement
  - Be located within a reasonable distance of a visitor drop-off space

The third type of majlis a rooftop communal majlis within apartment buildings provides residents access to shaded terraces, with a potential space for swimming pools and gardens. Msheireb also details guidelines with regard to privacy considerations for the entire project in general and for Qatari houses in particular. The incorporation of a passive cooling and climate control method has also been studied. The

architectural language is well articulated, and the forms are not foreign in shape. However, some of the buildings seem disproportionate with the surrounding area, being large in scale and overlooking the street directly without a proper intermediate space.

As for the interior, the provided guidelines for the materials and finishes are well detailed but very typical and repetitive, albeit understandably, as the project mainly focuses on urban planning; the hired designer is expected to develop the interiors. However, the first completed example, the Mandarin Oriental room, remains typical of expectations in the region in terms of the use of excessive patterns for decorative purposes only. A total of 30 Qatari townhouses that vary in size and number of rooms comprise the project. The majlis is located within the house, although it has a separate entrance. Most Qataris accept this solution for temporary rental houses or in case they have a shared family majlis. The houses are also linked and directly adjacent to retail areas and restaurants, an arrangement that affects the desired privacy level. The main



Figure 43: Communal majlis



Figure 42 Plans of a town house

majlis is considered a community center shared between a number of houses. Theoretically, this may work in two cases. The first is when the occupants are non-Qataris, and the second is when the occupants are an extended Qatari family. Even in these cases, the majlis is planned to include a ground floor for males and a first floor for females. This feature shows a lack of understanding of privacy in Qatari culture, in which auditory privacy is as important as visual privacy.

Developers seek insights into and requirements on housing, and they depend increasingly on large data analytics to obtain this information. Nonetheless, big data and standard research methods cannot determine residents’ true requirements and experiences. In general, the size of the provided house, the space allocated, the price compared with that of a regular house with a large parcel of land, and the ability to create a detached majlis and service area,

represent the limitations of the project. Furthermore, while traditional houses should be more affordable, the houses at Msheireb properties are within the same price range as those of other very expensive properties, such as the Pearl; Msheireb houses are therefore more exclusive than inclusive. Finally, the project can be considered through the lens of gentrification, in which urban

renewal projects lead to demographic displacement. In reality, this does not reflect Qatari culture, especially considering that the ultimate goal of bringing back Qataris to the center of the city seems secondary to the revenue to be generated. Therefore, the achievement of the re-Qatarization of Doha is not guaranteed.



## 4.5.3

Contemporary Majlis  
Competition Dubai Index

The Contemporary Majlis Competition is an annual competition that began in 2009, organized by Dubai Index. As stated in the Dubai Index website, the competition aims to “rethink the ‘majlis’ by giving it a contemporary, avant garde and green perspective.” The Juries select six designs every year to showcase the interpretation of a contemporary majlis. The applicant must be either a qualified interior designer or interior architect. The competition began with one jury award for the selected design; in 2012, a people’s choice award was added.

The ideas varied through the years from a T-floor bisymmetrical deconstruction of Islamic pattern used in mashrabiya with flexible, mismatched fabrics, shapes, and sizes of cushions, to a design inspired from the local poetry and fluid movement of Beduin ,to a design the resembles natural landscape that is built with recycled paper corrugated cardboard as a sustainable material. To a design resembling from footsteps left in the sand , figure 44 shows a collage of the winning designs since 2009. The idea of the competition is to create a majlis with an artistic approach; hence

most of the competitors have achieved the requirements. While some of the wining proposals are visually impressive, most do not exhibit in depth studies of the subject, which is understandable. The main goal is to generate discussion around the topic, which is a good step to engage the public in similar issues. However, the approach on this thesis shares the same topic but it is built on design for built environment in relation to sociocultural factors.



Figure 44 Winning Majlis Competition Designs

5

5

Investigation  
Data Collection  
Interviews  
Applied Research Design  
Exploration



# 5

## Investigation

Applying a social science inclusive based approach to understand the personal domestic experience is a key factor in providing a suitable design proposal. It stands to reason, therefore, that if one genuinely wants to understand the local modern and traditional architecture, obtaining an intimate knowledge of the cultural, social, and economic factors whose precepts and values it exemplifies must be sought.

The design process and methodology draws from the grounded theory approach, which is based on qualitative research focusing on interviews with household owners, group discussions, and personal observation and analysis. As the topic is related to both design and sociocultural factors, qualitative research was the ideal approach to gain insight into the perceptions of society. Analyzing the findings of the investigation of both the traditional and contemporary houses, including the majlis, resulted in a list of virtues that shaped the reference and the guidelines of the design process.

# 5.1

## Data Collection

The first investigation method involved collecting information about the meaning of the majlis and its social connotations, as well as the physical design of the traditional majlis in Qatar, the Arabian Gulf and Muslim Arab cities. This provided a broader understanding of different design solutions to solve similar problems. The findings of this process are explained in Chapter 5.

The second investigation method involved conducting interviews with Qatari families and visits to the families’ homes when possible, obtaining pictures of and plans of the house. I interviewed four members from different families. The purpose of the interviews was to collect data and to understand the perception of design, contemporary functional requirements, and decision-making process with regards to design selection, and to understand family life style and dynamics.

The target audience for the design proposals are middle class families within Qatari society; therefore, the interviewed members belong to this category. The interview questions are attached in Appendix 3.

### Interview 1

The first interview was conducted on November 2, 2013. The interview lasted for an hour, and following are the findings:

#### House Profile

The house consists of two levels and a penthouse built on a 600-m2 area, located in Al Mamoor district. Its construction started in 2002, and in 2004, the current owners procured the house during the final stage of the construction process. Many modifications were made to accommodate the functional needs of the owners, such as the addition of an outdoor kitchen and a driver’s room and the addition of the services penthouse, which consists of the maid’s room, laundry room, ironing room and storage. Among the major modifications was changing of the house facade finishes. As shown in the pictures, the owners wanted a more prestigious and classical image, which is why the arches, columns, stone and glass reinforced concert frames and patterns were added. Furthermore, some of the interior finishes and fixtures were replaced; for

example, the wall paint was changed to more neutral shades, all the toilets’ sanitary ware, and the internal kitchen’s tiling and cabinets.

#### Family Profile

The occupants’ nuclear family structure consists of a mother, who is 45 years old and works as a lab doctor; a 47 year-old father, who works as a security and safety manager in an oil company; a 18 year-old daughter; 12 and 10 year-old sons; and a 5 year-old daughter. The domestic staff consists of three maids, one driver, and one cook. The family has a modern, busy lifestyle; their mornings are spent at work or at school, and the domestic staff maintain the house during this time.

#### House Layout

The house has two entrances: one for people and one for cars. The ground floor consists of indoor and outdoor kitchens, a driver’s room, two stores, an office, and two toilets, in addition to a majlis and a sitting room. The dining room, which mainly serves formal guests and visiting relatives, is often used by the family members, as well as the sitting area (Figure 45). The first floor consists

of a family room, four bedrooms, two dressing rooms, and three toilets. The penthouse supplies the maid’s room and toilet, a store, a laundry room, and an ironing room. The majlis has a separate entrance and is used for both female and male guests. In case of an occasion in which guests from both genders are invited, the male guests use the majlis and the female use the living room located in the ground floor. Most of the family’s activities take place in the first floor during the week.



Figure 43: Communal majlis

Analysis

The house was originally built to meet the needs of another family, which is why it had to be modified to meet the needs of the current owners. These additional modifications were made to enhance the adjacencies relationship to achieve the family’s functional requirements; as shown in the illustration, most of the main required adjacencies are met. A door, which is always closed, provides the external entrance, and a bell with a speaker is installed to verify the identity of the visitor. A dedicated area in the front yard ensures gender privacy, which is used for short-period male visitors and as a smoking area for the father. The house was selected by the family based on a few factors, such as size and location. Changes were made to the interiors to simplify the design and change the colors. Calm colors were preferred; the mother critiqued the daughter for liking the color “red,” finding it ostentatious and not sophisticated. However, perception of colors differs between generations; what was considered ostentatious in the past may be nowadays acceptable. Original floors were maintained, although the mother preferred shiny

flooring because the look is ‘cleaner’. A Gypsum ceiling was also maintained the same and “described as simple”. Doors and the addition of wood entrance frames were based on catalogues. The design in general was inspired from other houses and catalogues “Lebanese” and given to the contractors directly. The interior design preference is French Lui, the 14th classic style (Figure 46 shows a collage of different rooms within the house), because the family thought it a timeless design. For the new house, the family hired an interior designer; the children rejected the contemporary design and asked for a classical design. When asked about examples that they have seen and been inspired by abroad, the family mentioned Versailles as an example and hotels for a smart house system. The daughter mentioned that she likes “Victorian design,” and Versailles because it’s old-fashioned, designed, different, and luxurious. The mother however criticized Versailles as having too many elements and could not be implemented in the same way due to size differences.

The outdoor servants’ quarter area was moved to the building roof in the new

The mother mentioned, Previously, people were rarely exposed to other cultures through media or through traveling to different countries as not everyone had the resources to travel, and the media was limited to the local and regional channels. And now that people have the availability to implement these designs, they actually started competing with each other in implementing and achieving these best and most luxurious designs (interview).

house, as having the staff located in the house yard limited the privacy of the front yard. The furniture was selected based on the availability in the market. The majlis furniture was imported from Egypt, because the design was luxurious. The perception of luxury is connected to importing the items from abroad, as they believe that the local market doesn’t have the ability to provide the same quality; furthermore, the ability to import items shows the wealth of the house owner.

When asked about her experience in her parents’ house prior to being married, the mother indicated that what she missed from the parents’ house

was not the design but the social and neighborhood life, as the neighborhood didn’t include as many expats as it does today. “Everyone knew everyone,” she said. “People have changed now; previously the mother didn’t have to work; now expenses of life require that the mother has to work. The family life has changed due to the new technologies and games.”

The fireej experience, in the mother’s opinion, is connected to having homogenous demographics within one neighborhood, as all share generic common understandings of tradition and values. The change in the lifestyle and working hours, and the fact that most of the women are working, has also impacted the relationships within the family and with the neighborhood.

The family plans to include an external majlis in their future house. The mother stated that in addition to the father’s need of a majlis, sitting in the front yard with his friends currently limits their movement within the house. The majlis inside the house is too close to the ground level family room, which doesn’t make it practical with regards to auditory

privacy. Finally, the mother mentioned that the sons are getting older, they should not bring their friends inside the house, and they need to have better connections with their father.



Figure 46 Pictures of the different rooms in the house



Figure 47: Pictures of the house facade



Interview 2

The second interview was conducted on November 28, 2013. The interview lasted for an hour, and following are the findings:

House Profile

The house consists of two levels and a penthouse dedicated for the domestic staff, built on a 600-m2 area, located in the Al Sulta district. Built during the late 70s, the house was rented by others initially, and the family moved to this house in 1993. Previously, the family lived in a house in the Qatar Petroleum compound in Duhkan. The house was renovated during the 90s, and modified several times again to suit the changing requirements, including brothers getting married, and the father falling sick. The interior of the house was again renovated in 2005 (Figure 47).

Among the major modifications was changing of the house facade finishes. As shown in the pictures, the owners wanted a more prestigious and classical image, which is why the arches, columns, stone and glass reinforced concert frames and patterns were added. As with the previously described family, some

of the interior finishes and fixtures were replaced, including all the toilets’ sanitary ware and the internal kitchen’s tiling and cabinets, and the wall paint was changed to more neutral shades.

Family Profile

The occupants are two daughters and their mother. The mother, a housewife, is in her 60s; the eldest daughter is in her 40s and works in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the younger daughter is in her 30s and works in Qatar Foundation the father passed away in 2007 . The domestic staff consists of two maids and one driver. The family also has a modern busy lifestyle, with mornings spent at work. The staff and the mother maintain the house during the morning. Their brothers live in a house adjacent to the main family house.

House Layout

The house has two entrances: one for people and one for cars. The ground floor consists of indoor and outdoor kitchens, and the driver’s room, and additionally, the majlis, a dining room, and the sitting room. The first floor consists of a family room, and three bedrooms with their dedicated dressing rooms and toilets.

The penthouse consists of the maid’s room and toilet (Figure 48-49).

Analysis

The participants highlighted that previous houses and designs were mainly beige and brown; consequently, in this house they wanted to add colors. The father was not very happy with the selected color, as he thought that it was very dark. The decision maker was the older daughter; the younger daughter started participation in the decision making recently. While the participants preferred a simpler design, the family thought that the design of public areas within the house should be more classical. The design was inspired from magazines.

The majlis is not used by the brothers frequently, as they have their own houses, and they mainly visit their friends in their homes. The majlis is used by both men and women, and it is for formal visitors.

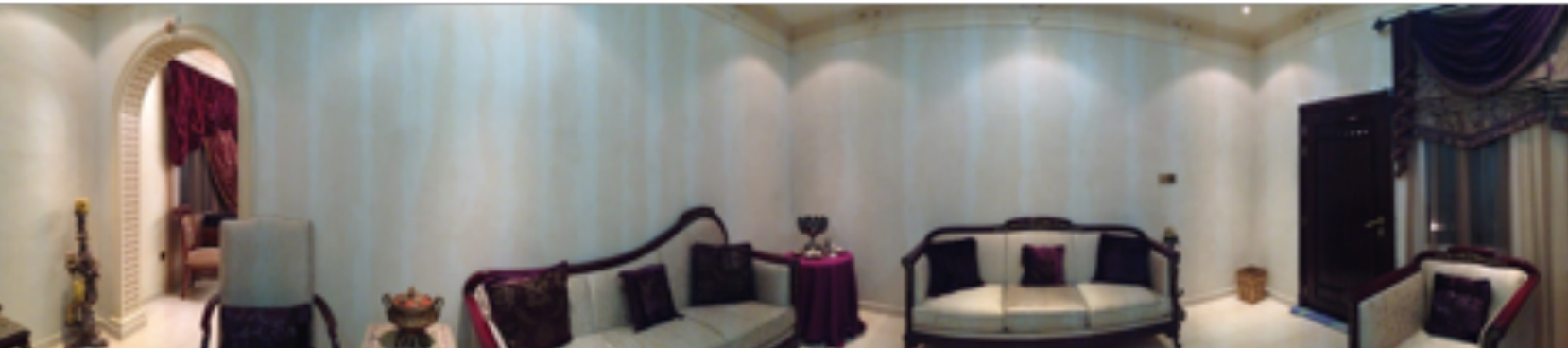
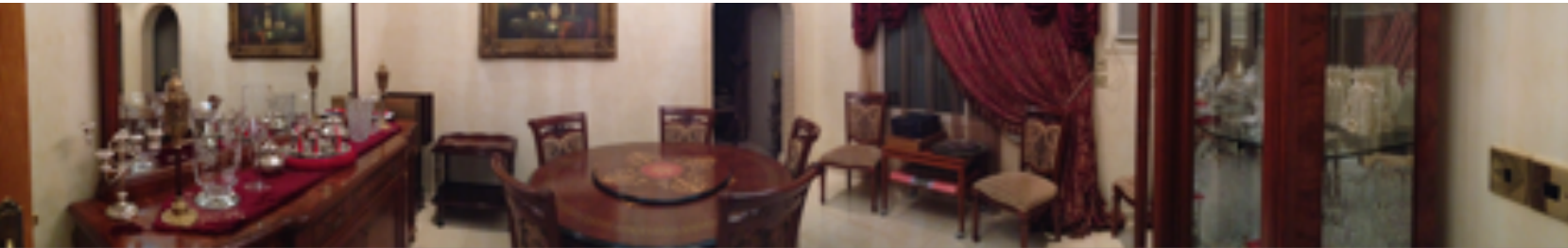


Figure 48: Pictures of the interior guest reception areas



**Interview 3**

The third interview was conducted on December 2, 2013. The interview lasted for an hour, and following are the findings:

House Profile

The house consists of two levels built on a 600-m2 area, located in the Al Dafna district. The construction was completed in 1992, and the house was offered for rent until 2000, when it was renovated the family moved in. Additional modifications were added to the house recently, such as the expansion of some rooms, and the addition of mirrors and decoration in some areas (Figure 50).

Family Profile

The occupants’ nuclear family structure consists of a mother, who is 49 years old and worked in the educational system and currently retired; a 59 year-old father, who has a PHD and teaches at Qatar University; daughters aged 25, 18, and 15 years old; and two sons of 23 and 9 years old. The eldest daughter works at Qatar Foundation; the other daughters and sons attend different school grades. The domestic staff consists of three maids and one driver. Like the

interviewed families, the family has a modern, busy lifestyle, with mornings spent at work and school. The staff and the mother maintain the house during this time.

House Layout

The house has two entrances: one for people and one for cars. The ground floor consists of two bedrooms one for the mother and one for the maids in addition to the external driver’s room. The ground floor also has a children’s playroom, a dining room, one living room divided into three different sections (Figure 51), and two majlises one internal and one external in addition to indoor and outdoor kitchens. The first floor consists of a family living room, a library, and five bedrooms with bathrooms and dressing rooms. The internal majlis has a lobby and a side entrance used separately from the main family room. The women mainly uses this majlis; the younger men use the external majlis, while the father meets his friends in their majlis. Gender privacy is observed in the dedication of these separate majlises.

Analysis

The mother was interested in art and

painting, and accordingly, she selected everything in the house. While father tends to select the plainer option, the mother and daughters have the last decision. The external facade was repainted two years ago. The previous color was white; the current yellow color selected by the mother was criticized by the daughter, explaining that the white was more sophisticated, and that “the neighbors criticized the new color, describing it as having ice-cream colors” (interview).

Concerning the majlis design and color scheme, the family is happy about the design and appreciates the monochromatic color scheme. A formal space is needed in the house; the participants in the interview mentioned that the polished marble provides a sense of formality, in addition to the polished finish being more luxurious (Figure 52). Colors were added to the armchairs frame to enhance the feeling of luxury and formality. The family intended to add details in the ceiling as well, and considered the design perfect for the function. The outdoor seating area is used for outdoor family gatherings and barbeques. As for the ground floor living

room, a mirror was added recently and described as a more cozy and casual space. The interview ended by the participant explaining that if she has the chance, she would love to bring back the privacy elements within the courtyard house. As for the design style, “Victorian design” is what she would like to include in the public and semi-public areas, and a simpler option for the bedrooms, in addition to exploring complementary colors.



Figure 50: Pictures showing the facade of the house.



Figure 51: Pictures showing the living room



Interview 4

The fourth interview was conducted on December 4, 2013. The interview lasted for an hour, and following are the findings:

House Profile

The house consists of two levels built on a 600-m2 area, located in the Al Dafna district. The construction was completed in 1984; in addition to the main house, there is an additional extension that was rented until recently. The eldest son renovated and moved to the expansion in 2012. In the main house, the furniture was changed only in the living room (Figure 53).

Family Profile

The occupants are considered an extended family, consisting of the mother, three daughters, two sons, and an aunt, the father having passed recently. The house occupants’ age group ranges from 46-18 years old. The eldest son and aunts are working, and the other son and daughters are in different school stages. The domestic staff consists of five maids and four drivers. The family has a modern, busy lifestyle, with mornings spent at work and school. The

staff and the mother maintain the house during this time.

House Layout

The house has two entrances: one for people and one for cars. The ground floor consists of an internal formal men’s majlis, a dining room that is used for the family and guests, and an internal kitchen, in addition to three guest bedrooms and one maids’ room. On the first floor, the house is divided into wings, with a total of eleven bedrooms with their bathrooms, four living rooms and four small pantries. The expansion consists of two floors and a penthouse; the ground floor includes the men’s majlis, living room, office, and a kitchen. The first floor includes three bedrooms, and the penthouse offers a bedroom, a living room, and a maid’s room. There are also two external bedrooms for the drivers (Figure 54).

Analysis

The main house was actually designed by an interior designer, in addition to the family members’ inspirations from their travels and other elements that they observed in other houses and wanted to implement. As for the

expansion, the design was based on the design and color schemes of the main house, inspired from magazines and through travels. The floors were selected to be marble in all the spaces in the expansion; a polished finish for the marble was preferred. The design intent was to maintain a darker color scheme including brown and golden in the more public areas and lighter colors in the bedrooms. The colors of the furniture were selected to have an accent and complementary theme. The participant described that the men’s majlis should include a U-shaped furniture layout, with uncomfortable seating to provide the sense of formality and tables in-between and in the majority of the majlises there are tables located in the middle as well. He also mentioned that most houses currently include two majlises, formal and informal, in which the informal majlis would include a TV, while the formal majlis would include a small showcase area. The majlis also includes a toilet and a small serving area. The design in the expansion was inspired from Versailles and described as luxurious, as Paris and especially Versailles is the house of luxury in the level of detailing and

materials. The participant mentioned that in his opinion, people would like to include features from the traditional architecture; however, there is no clear book or reference to draw from, as with the more available French baroque style. There is no consolidated book that clarifies to the people the identity of Qatari architecture visually. The noticeable pattern in the four interviews

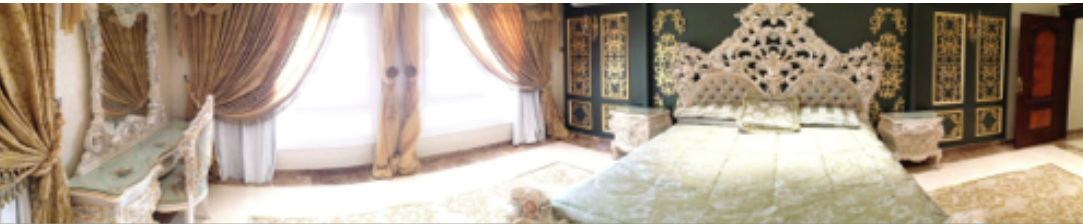


Figure S3: House façade

is that occupants differentiate between the selection of design for the public and private areas within their houses. In addition to the alignment of opinion with regards to the characteristics of a formal place within the house, and to the design style that is suitable for the public areas, apparently the overdesigned style is mainly dedicated for the interior of the public spaces in the house, while the exterior facade is designed to be simpler. This phenomenon of contradicting elements is apparent in the design and between the designs and social and religious teachings, which tend to encourage humbleness and simplicity. The gap between the physical environment and the practiced values is apparent. While



most of the participants agreed with the concept of simplicity, most clarified that their design was selected based on the idea of visitors’ perception and the convictions of the house owners, as they would like to be perceived as high status both socially and financially.



# 5.2

Applied Research Design

Throughout the course of the design studies for the MFA, we were assigned projects that addressed the same issues of a contemporary design within Qatar on different levels.

These product designs provided a good exercise to streamline the design approach. Although the trilogy of privacy, simplicity, and contextuality were not part of the design concept, they were included in the design.

## 1. Incense Burner

The assignment was to design an incense burner using any desired materials; it was part of the Martials Methodologies class. The concept of incense burner provided in Figure 56 is based on the process of burning incense in Qatar.

Two ingredients may be selected, which are the scented wood and the powder of the scented wood. Accordingly there are two compartments to store these scented elements. The third one is for the actual burning of the incense.

The three compartments are stackable and made of walnut wood, and they fit between two hands. The top of the

incense burner has an opening to allow the smoke to escape. The design was intended to be practical; it maintains the traditions and takes the process and rituals into consideration but offers a contemporary yet simple form. Once

passed around, it is held in the hands as a precious object.



## 2. Emiri Diwan Gift

The assignment was for a competition to create a state gift for the visitors of the Emiri Diwan that represents Qatar. The idea was related to the identity of Qatar today and what it represents. This was a group project with Rober Canak, in which we analyzed the past and the present principles and tried to combine them. Qatar is trying to create a knowledge-based society, looking forward to the future while maintaining its roots and heritage. Hence the object is made of metal with perforations, the word (Read) , which is the first verse of Quran, and also a symbol for the importance of knowledge as it is hidden between the two panels of the simple screen and can only be discovered once a light source is available. The gift is meant to be interactive and represent a sense of discovery as well. The word ‘read’ is made of wood, representing the past and the perforated metal is inspired from the privacy screens but in an abstract manner. The name of the gift is ‘Light of Knowledge’ (Figure 57), and it was one of the winners of the competition. The gift includes the three principles of privacy, simplicity, contextuality, and it utilizes the privacy screen.



Figure 57: light of Knowledge



3. Vases

The design studio brief was dedicated for the exploration of the thesis concept from different aspects; the goal is to encourage the students to think out of the box.

For this project, the brief was to design a decorative item within the majlis. The item should thus represent the desired aesthetics of the participants as revealed during the data collection phase while maintaining the concept of simplicity and contextuality. Figure 58 shows two wooden blocks with subtle carving to allocate a space for the vase (Figure 58).

The blocks are overlapping but not fixed to maintain flexibility of composition. The second one is a felt cover showing the feeling of coziness in the space and utilizing natural materials. Both have lead to the fact that it is possible for the design to be monumental and simple at the same time.



Figure 58: Vases

5.2.1

The Majlis

The design exploration of the majlis is an experiment to implement the three virtues of privacy, simplicity and contextuality. The aim is to provide one proposal, as the possibilities are endless. The design followed specific criteria and principles

Design Criteria

A)Social considerations:

- To bring the generations together again (unifying the majlis)
- Encouraging personal communication
- Cutural habits
- Sociology and cultural anthropology
- Psychology
- Social attitudes and rituals
- Perceptual tendencies

B) Requirements:

- Pantry
- Toilets
- Inside/outside seating
- Formal/informal majlis

C)Privacy Considerations:

- Between the majlis and the

street/neighborhood

- Between the majlis and the house
- Auditory privacy

Design Virtues:

1.Privacy: A strict hierarchical attitude to privacy through the urban design of the towns, the space planning of the house, and the design of doors and windows.

2.Simplicity: One of the Islamic concepts that encourage Muslims to respect others and not to appear pretentious. The concept applies to courtyard house design through the promotion of interior over exterior development. The articulation of internal spaces reflects the construction techniques and incorporates non-representational abstract elements of ornamentation. This created an intriguing mystery and sense of discovery. Islamic architecture in general is described as ‘architecture of the veil’ as the beauty is found in the internal spaces, which are not visible from the outside.

3.Contextuality: The traditional house was developed in response to environmental, climatic, religious, and cultural factors. Every element in the traditional house embodied an answer to a different problem that emerged according to a specific condition.

## 5.2.2.1

Process / Experiments

The design process depended on rapid testing of the design of plans, elevations and models, and each proposal was evaluated against the previously described criteria.

### Proposal One:

One level L-shaped majlis, with formal and informal spaces in addition to the outdoor space. The positive aspects about this design are: the simplicity of style, contextuality in form, and the use of the idea of badgheer, a vernacular ventilation method, as an indirect lighting system. The design needed improvements in space layout and visual connectivity between the formal and informal majlis.

### Proposal Two:

Three-level majlis with the informal majlis and the toilets and pantry located on the basement floor, the formal majlis on the ground floor, and an open-area majlis on the first floor. The positive aspects about this design are: The simplicity of style, contextuality in form, and the use of multiple levels inspired from examples provided in Fez, Bahrain, Najed, and Wakrah. Another positive aspect includes the additional

provision of a proper outdoor area. The design needed improvements in space layout and visual connectivity between the formal and informal majlis, with consideration to more visibility of the vertical connection from the formal majlis.

Three-level majlis, with the toilets and pantry located on the basement floor, the formal majlis on the ground floor with a small front yard, and the informal majlis located on the first floor. The positive aspects about this design are: The simplicity of style, contextuality in form, and the use of multiple levels inspired from examples provided in Fez, Bahrain, Najed, and Wakrah. Another positive aspect is the provision of outdoor areas on the first and ground floor. The design needed improvements in visual connectivity between the formal and informal majlis and the layout of the first floor, with consideration to the vertical connection being more visible from the formal majlis.

### Proposal Four:

Three-level majlis, with the toilets and pantry located on the basement floor, the formal majlis on the ground floor

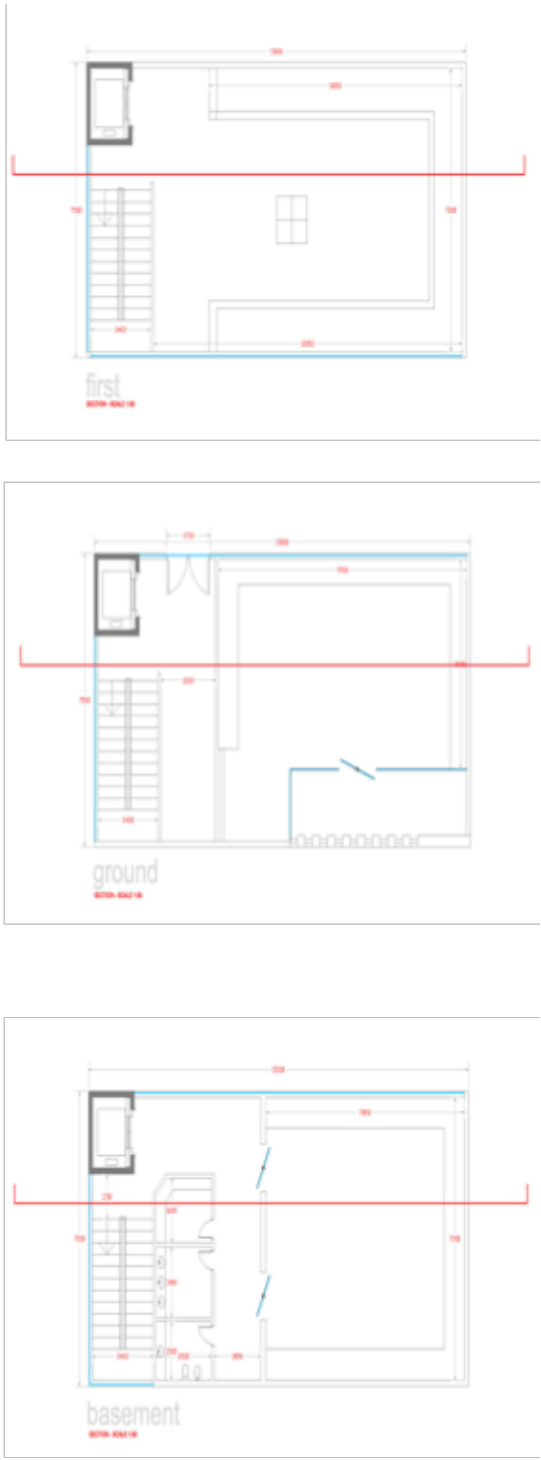
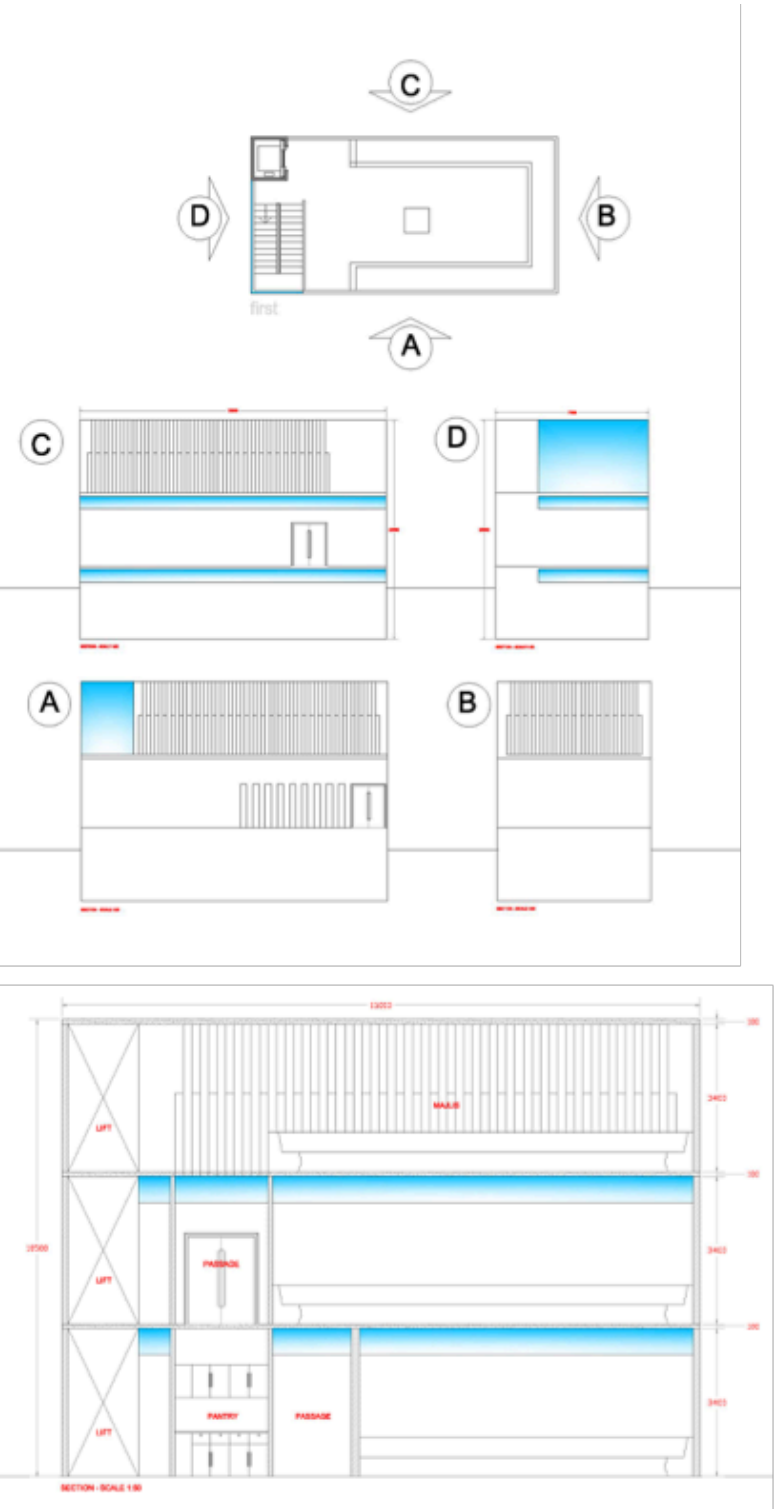
with a small front yard, and the informal majlis located on the first floor. The positive aspects about this design are: The simplicity of style, contextuality in form, and the use of multiple levels inspired from examples provided in Fez, Bahrain, Najed, and Wakrah. Another positive aspect is the provision of outdoor areas on the first and ground floor. The design needed improvements in visual connectivity between the formal and informal majlis and the layout of the first floor, and improvement in the openness of the first floor, with consideration to the vertical connection being more visible from the formal majlis.



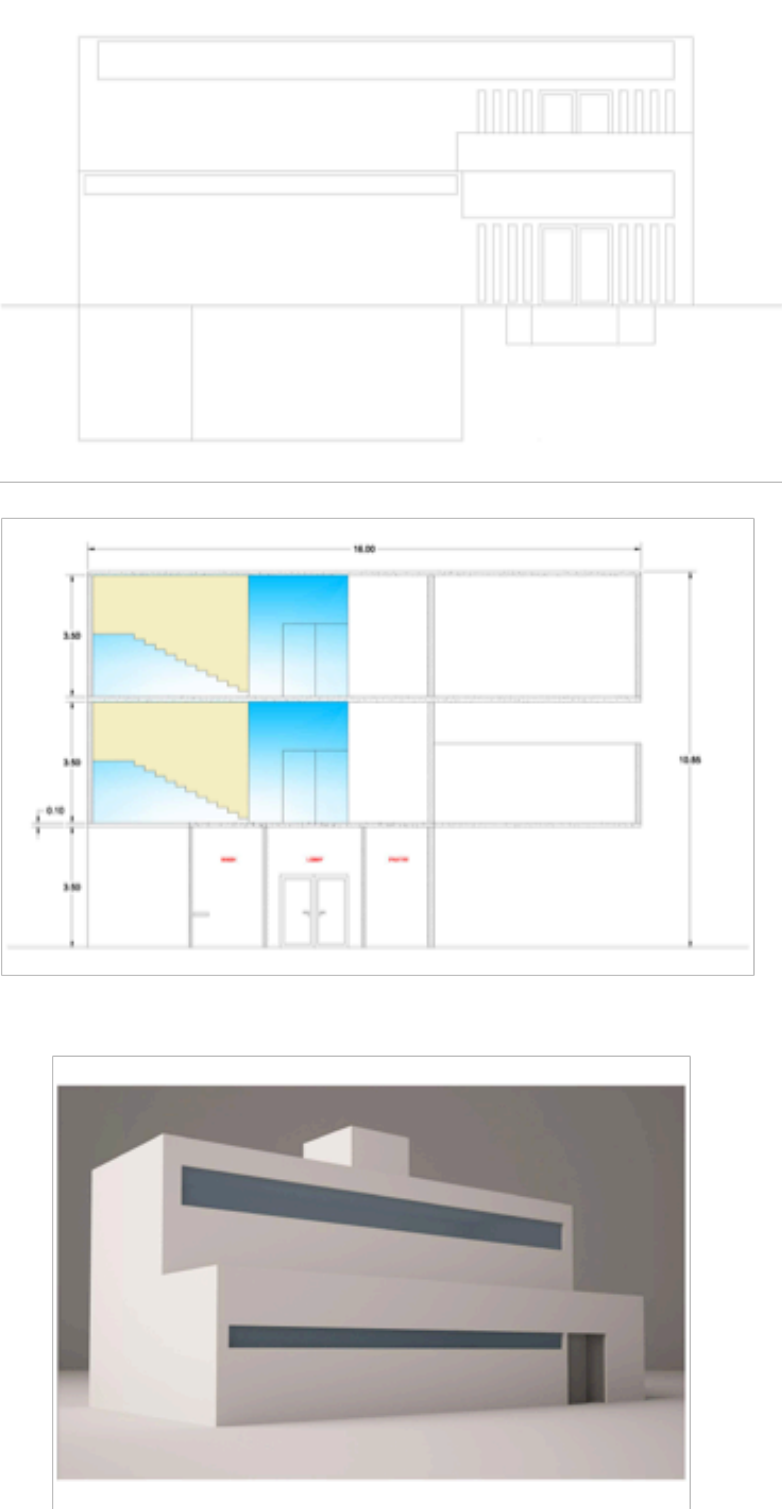
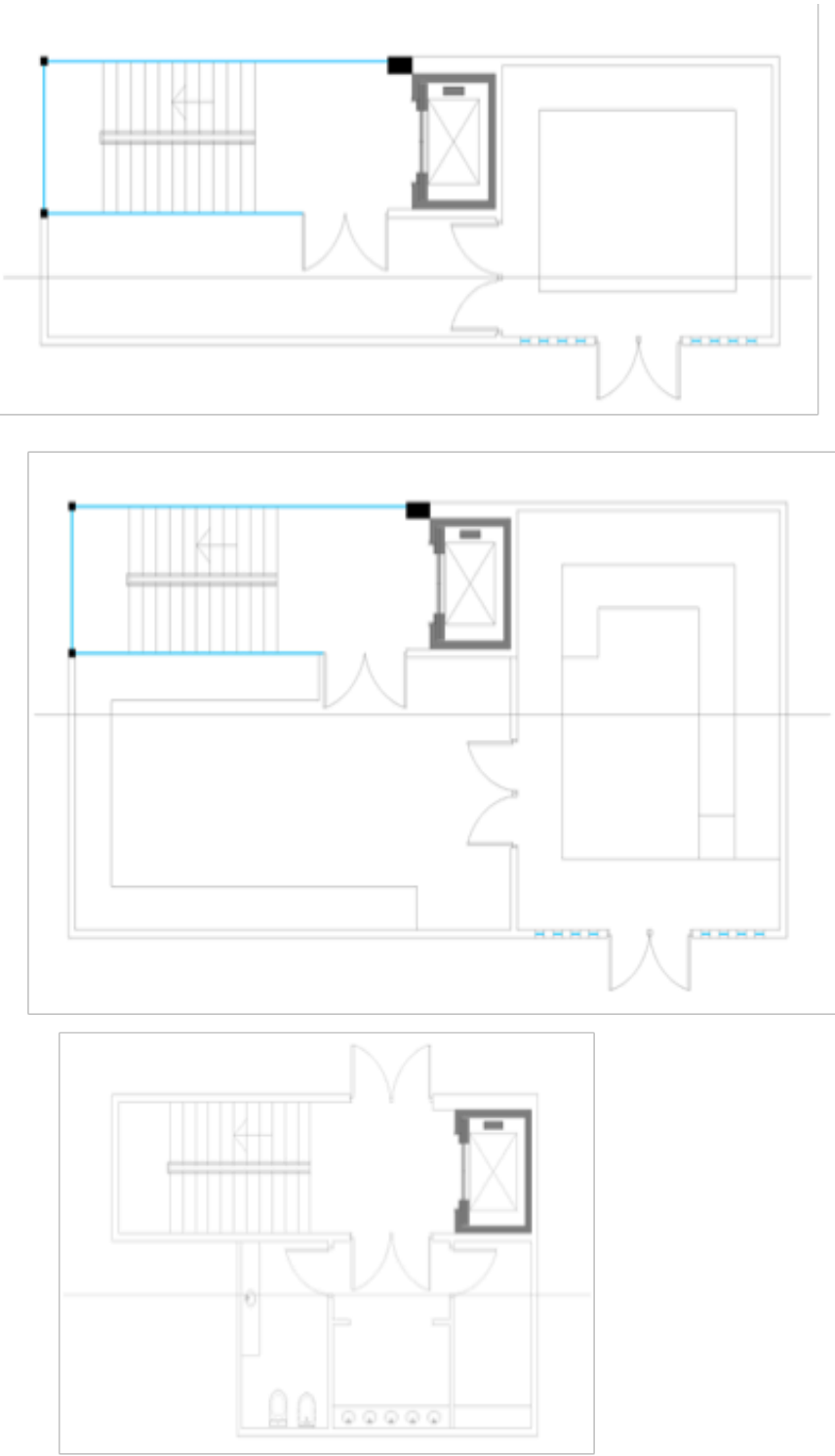
### Proposal One



Proposal Two



Proposal Three



5.2.2.2

Outcome

The outcome is a proposal to achieve the provided design criteria as noted in the process and experiments. The virtues were divided into subcategories to provide a clear design criteria for this proposal. The final proposal took into consideration all the provided notes and comments and achieved them accordingly. The majlis is divided into three levels, with the toilets and pantry located on the basement floor, the formal majlis on the ground floor with a small front yard that can be opened to the interior space as climate permits, and it has a visual connection with the informal majlis. The people enter the majlis through the small outdoor area, which offers a pleasant experience, especially with the inclusion of plants and a small water feature to also aid the climate enhancement of the area. The entrance to the formal majlis is indirect to provide the required privacy level for visitors of the majlis.

The informal majlis is accessed through the vertical connection, divided from the formal majlis by a glass door thus providing visual connectivity but auditory privacy. The informal majlis is located on the first floor with one fully

enclosed space and one semi-enclosed space that opens to the roof seating area; the seating area overlooks the street via a low parapet. The windows overlooking the house as well as any neighboring houses are covered with privacy screens and translucent glass to achieve the necessary privacy.

The windows overlooking the street from the ground floor are frosted as well to provide privacy for the majlis at street level. The interior layout is simple but takes into consideration the required hierarchy in Qatari traditions. Seating faces the door for the owner to receive guests; no seating is oriented with backs facing the door, as it is considerate impolite. Movable cushions between the seats provide necessary personal privacy. The furniture and materials selection was simple yet sophisticated to meet the design criteria, yet cater to the comments provided by the research participants with regards to the provision of luxury.

Hints of metallic gold were added to address this requirements, in addition to the type and quality of materials such as travertine and translucent concrete.

The design focused on accents such as the rugs and tables as well. Personal interaction of the visitors takes place within these elements; for example, when males are served drinks, they may use the tables placed accordingly. The tables reflect different methods, but all are flexible. A cluster of tables provided in the center recollects the traditional duwa, which was used to prepare coffee and tea. The tables can be also used according to the number of seats. Cantilevered tables were also provided in addition to the corner tables.

On the first floor, which is informal, flexible and removable wooden placements were designed, and the rugs were selected to recall the techniques of traditional rugs. The interior and exterior lines of the design were simple and contextual in terms of form, shape, and selection of materials. The proposed design is one option based on this criteria; the majlis could be also achived with one or two-story buildings based on the provided plot size.

The three virtues include guidelines that can be interpreted based on the requirements of the location and the

user; however, these elements are essential to consider in order to provide a comprehensive design. The outcome of the previously described experiments, discussion, and investigation is a list of guidelines for designers to consider for the design of the majlis in the future: Recommendations of Design Guidelines

1.Planning

- Creation of one space that combines the activities of all generations within the family to enhance their social connectivity and family ties.
- Consideration of creating a multilevel majlis to achieve the required program within a suitable area.
- Introduction of well-plannedoutdoor spaces for the majlis, while considering both the comfort level and physiological factors via the incorporation of water features, plantation, and enhancing positive impacts in creating a comfortable microclimate and a pleasing sensual environment.
- Utilization of the roof area as an outdoor space contributes to minimizing the overall area, and to the creation of required outdoor spaces.

2.Privacy

- Planning:
- A courtyard house plan limits the exposure of the house to the majlis.
  - Consideration of the provision of visual connectivity.

Location:

- The majlis should be located to one side of the house to avoid exposure of the main house entrance and the pedestrian entrance

- Entrance:
- Separation of the semi-public majlis area from the family private area is a fundamental feature of the Qatari house. It is recommended for the entrance to the house and the entrance to the majlis to be separated as well.
  - Consideration of indirect entrances to both the house and the majlis to maintain the desired level of privacy.
  - Consideration of the location of neighboring house entrances and the location of majlis is very essential; entrance of the

majlis should not have exposure to the neighbors’ pedestrian entrance.

- Windows:
- The majlis windows should be open to the outside and not to the main house development.
  - The majlis windows should not open on the neighbors’ house.
  - Skylights, high windows, and window treatments materials such as screens and frosted glass can be considered to bring light to the majlis while maintaining privacy.

3.Contextuality

- The design must consider the social habits, norms, and rituals in the furniture layout and location of doors and services. Seating should be arranged peripherally. It should be assumed that the host of the majlis will sit in a chair opposite the entrance door or, alternatively, at the center of one of the seating area
- People should never show their backs to the door or to each other. Furniture layout should be oriented accordingly.
- Occasional tables are to be located where they can be used for cups and glasses.



- It is advisable for forms and shapes to be designed to address both the environmental and the social requirements. Foreign forms such as sloped roof buildings with bricks are not functional or contextual.
- It is recommended for the design to consider providing a timeless solution rather than reflecting a certain period.

#### **4.Simplicity**

- Simplicity in aesthetics refers to a focus on prioritizing proportion, light, and layering of elements. The simplicity offers an opportunity of providing a sophisticated yet timeless design solution.

# 6

Conclusion



# 6

## Conclusion

The majlis is a central part of the house and society in Qatar and the Arabian Gulf countries. It represents the household’s occupants to society and its social and economic status. The majlis is the space where different generations meet to share knowledge and connect. The topic of the majlis design and its social impact is broad yet, however, not well explored. An understanding of the historic and theoretical context of the majlis design in Arab Muslim societies, including the Arabian Gulf, was essential to understand the attributes of the majlis and the different design solutions provided to achieve the majlis built environment and social requirements. It also provided good inspiration for locations and an understanding of privacy.

The background information relating to the built environment in Qatar is diverse; the impact of religious, political, economic, climatic, technological, and cultural aspects, in addition to the regional and international changes, provided a clear understanding of reasons for the different approaches between the Arabian Gulf countries and the social changes and shifts in Qatar. This comprehension of context aided

the discussion with participants in the interviews and provided better insight into their choices. Applying an emic, social science inclusive-based approach to understand the personal domestic experience is a key factor in providing a suitable design proposal. Obtaining intimate knowledge of the cultural, social, and economic factors whose precepts and values it exemplifies is essential to understand the local modern and traditional architecture. The applied research was inspired mainly on the answers obtained by the participants in the interviews and examples explored in the context. The main discovery regarding the majlis’ role in society, however, extends beyond its social impact, as the interaction between the modern government and the traditional role of the majlis system still prevail.

The research process, primarily the interviews, were essential for the understanding and provision of information with regards to the majlis operation. However, being a researcher of the female gender meant limited access to the actual experience. A men’s majlis is still limited to men exclusively. In addition, literature about the majlis

specifically and the interiors of the traditional majlis in the Arabian Gulf more generally are rare. A more extensive research with actual site visits to the mentioned majlis in the research would have been helpful in providing a better understanding of the visual and spatial experience. One visit was conducted in Bahrain, which provided a good understanding, but it remained limited, as it is very similar to Qatar due to their historic connection.

The majlis continues to be one of the most important mechanisms for interaction and decision-making. Furthermore, the social connection within the family and the relatives between different generations is being impacted by modern lifestyles and technology. Hence, many families are resolving this problem by creating a shared majlis that is centrally located but not necessarily connected to their house. The enhancement of the design of the majlis and its ability to serve both as a communication medium and a physical space in which all generations may meet comfortably to discuss, exchange knowledge, and strengthen their ties is essential.

The majlis binds all individuals together not just within the local neighborhoods, districts, or urban environments. The majlis a physical link which gives strength and continuity to small units of development in a way in which state governments cannot. Understanding a family’s stylistic choices their reasoning and logic was important, as the gap between the actual rituals that take place in a majlis, the morals that a majlis promotes, and the design of the majlis are in contradiction. Providing an alternative example and design guidelines is thus the first step for both social and design change. However, producing an actual physically built example will be essential to create this change. As discovered in the research, people tend to design their spaces based on what they have seen in other houses and magazines, or other people’s perceptions of a certain design. Therefore, bringing a real example to life is imperative for change to begin.

### Further Directions

•As the research focused on the qualitative approach, a quantitative approach can be considered in the future.

- This study focused on the social and cultural aspects of the majlis and addressed its context with regards to the forms. A future study could focus on climate control and sustainability.
- As the subject is rarely addressed, it is recommended to pursue a study that includes the detailed examination of the majlis in all the Gulf countries both Arabian and Persian through site visits and analysis.
- A study on the ‘virtual majlis’ taking place on social media.
- A study about regionalism of design in Qatar.

# 7

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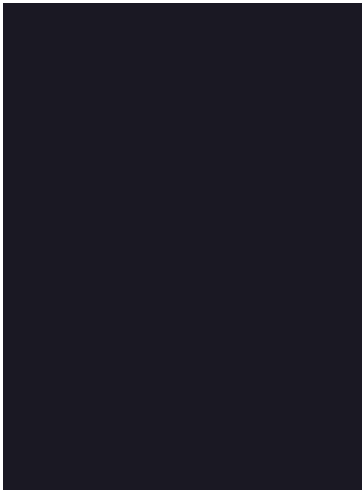
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